

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THE AVTA

(Pre-1930s Australian Variety Industry Specific)

NB: The various genre terms below were invariably applied "freely" within the industry and hence their use often became somewhat "arbitrary." For a comprehensive analysis of these terms see their entries linked to the **Genre** page.

[Blue](#)-coloured script indicates a hyperlink to an individual entry within the AVTA.

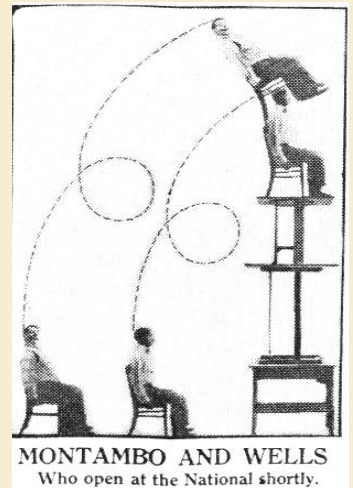


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ABORIGINALITIES: The only use of this term identified to date is its frequent application in advertising for [Dave "Murrumbidgee" Gardner](#), a Melbourne-based comedian associated with Melbourne's Peoples Popular Concerts during the 1890s. While details concerning his act are yet to be located, it is possible that he may have been the first, if not the only, minstrel comic to affect an indigenous character type on the Australian stage.

ACROBATIC ACTS: Acrobatic acts were a mainstay of vaudeville from the early 1900s onwards. While some performers came from circus backgrounds (e.g. The St Leons), the vast majority of acts were specifically designed for the stage by variety artists like the [Four Stagpooles](#) who specialised in knockabout/ acrobatic comedy. The type of acts presented, limited only by the imagination, included balancing, tumbling, teeterboard, knockabout comedy and bar acts. Aerial and wire work tended to be a feature of the bigger companies which utilised venues with larger stage areas. Some popular acts included: The Two Harlans, Kitchie and Kliftie, and Klinto and Wade/Klinto and Mack.

- See also: **Knockabout Comedy**



*Australian Variety 25 Aug.
(1915),*

ACT: 1. A self-contained performance with no connection to any other part of a minstrel or vaudeville programme. A typical programme comprised eight to twelve acts of a diverse nature, with performance times ranging between five to thirty minutes. The term "turn" was also often used in place of act.

2. The term "act" can also refer to a performer, duo, trio or group of any number of performers in vaudeville or variety.

ADVANCE REP: Most touring minstrels and vaudeville companies secured the services of an advance representative who would travel the proposed itinerary of towns undertaking a number of promotional activities. This would include such things as booking and overseeing advertising for the company with the local newspapers. He would also likely arrange with local businesses to advertise their wares or services in the venue during the season (these typically comprised posters which were displayed on the drop curtain or around the walls of the venue). The advance rep might also organise some local children to deliver dodgers (aka flyers) around town and usually in return for free tickets to a show.

Part of the advance rep's duties would be to finding out about notable local citizens and recent issues of concern which could in turn be used by the comedians and front-of-house manager. Any information about towns, travelling conditions, competition etc that might be needed by the tour manager or the organisation underwriting the tour would also be sent back prior to the commencement of tour. If the tour was a long one (as with [Harry Clay](#)'s annual Queensland operations), the advance rep might also be engaged to undertake his duties while the tour was underway.

A.F.A.: Actors Federation of Australia. The A.F.A. took over from the Australian Variety Artists' Federation (A.V.A.F.) in 1920, while also including actors from the "legitimate" theatre. It was affiliated with the Actors and Artists' Association of America, Variety Artistes' Federation (UK), and the Union Syndicate des Artistes Lyriques of France (Napier, 4).

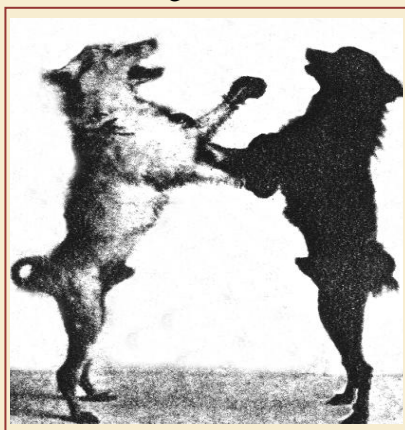
AERIAL ACTS: See: WIRE & AREIAL ACTS

AFTERPIECE: See MINSTREL FARCE

AGENT: In Australia and New Zealand local performers generally dealt directly with managers and entrepreneurs such as [Fullers' Theatres](#) and [Harry Clay](#) when securing engagements. This was quite different to the American and British vaudeville circuits which by the twentieth century required performers to have an agent to negotiate contracts. By around 1917 a number of vaudeville agencies began to spring up in Sydney and Melbourne in order to handle the increasing number of local performers seeking work. Some were initially started by the entrepreneurs themselves [see for example [Harry Clay](#)] as a means of reducing the workload on either themselves or their senior managers.

AMATEUR NIGHTS: See TRIAL NIGHTS

ANIMAL ACTS: The most common animal acts to play the Australian and New Zealand vaudeville circuits were those comprising dogs, cats, birds and monkeys. Among the more unusual animal acts were those such as [Odiva's Seals](#) and Olly Olsen and his Sea Lions. Some acts were more simply presented, like Clivelli (whose dog "Spot" performed wondrous tricks in the 1910s), Chester ("the horse with the human brain") and Jessie "the wonder dog."



Three of the most popular acts to tour Australasia during the 1910s and 1920s were [Harry] [Abdy's Cats and Dogs](#) (aka Abdy's Miniature Animal Circus), [Ted] Bailey's Posing Dogs and Sheep, [Clive] Clivelli's Miniature Circus, Captain McFarlane's Dog and Monkey Circus, Professor Felix's Monkeys and Dogs, Professor Godfrey's Dogs and Monkeys, Florence Henderson (dogs and monkeys), Kemp's Buck-jumping Ponies, and Leonard's White Poodles.

Abdy's Boxing Dogs
Australian Variety 16 Dec. (1914), 9

ARTISTE: An alternative to "performer," the term artiste was generally applied to professional variety performers within the media or by promoters. The performers themselves preferred to call themselves "pros" (as in professionals).

ARTISTIC POSING: See POSING

ATHELETIC ACTS: See EQUILIBRISTS • STRONGMEN

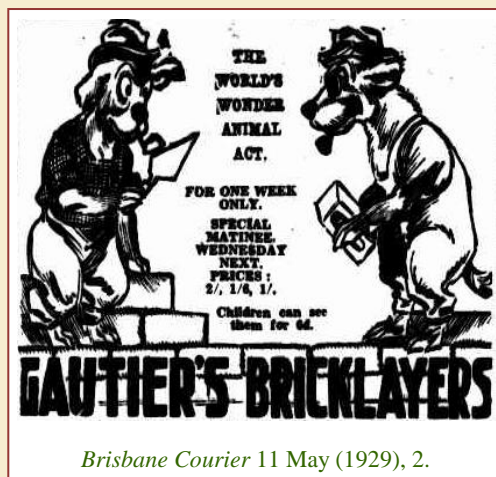
AUSTRALIAN FEDERATED STAGE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION: See T.E.E.A.

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATED THEATRICAL EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION: See T.E.E.A.

AUSTRALIAN THEATRICAL AND AMUSEMENT EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION: See T.E.E.A.

A.V.A.A. (AUSTRALIAN VAUDEVILLE ARTISTS ASSOCIATION): Founded in Melbourne sometime around 1906 or early 1907 by [Sam Gale](#). A Sydney branch was established in May 1907. The A.V.A.A. ended in 1911 due to an insufficient local membership. It was continued in 1912 by a new organisation, the A.V.A.F.

A.V.A.F. (AUSTRALIAN VAUDEVILLE ARTISTS FEDERATION): Founded in 1912 following the cessation of operations by the A.V.A.A., this association continued through until 1950, at which time it was finally closed down due to insufficient membership.¹



Brisbane Courier 11 May (1929), 2.

¹ [Valantyne Napier](#) records that the A.V.A.F. was forced to close down in 1920 and was subsequently superseded by the A.F.A., while the [Australian Trade Union Archives](#) entry records that it was finally deregistered in 1950. There is currently no explanation for this discrepancy. **NB:** All citations referenced from Valantyne Napier are from her *Glossary of Terms Used in Variety* (1996) unless otherwise noted.

BALANCING ACTS: See EQUILIBRISTS • MUSICAL ACTS

BALLET: See CHORUS

BALL PUNCHING: Also known as "bag punching" this act, a traditional part of boxing training, began appearing on the variety stage in the late 1800s and by the early 1900s had become extremely popular, especially when performed by women. There were numerous bag punching "novelty acts", with highly skilled people punching multiple bags touring Australia around the turn of the century, with [Dot Ireland](#) ("Australia's champion lady ball-puncher") being a particular favourite.



Source: Speedball Central

- BILL:** 1. The poster or placard pasted on to hoardings or the front of a theatre to advertise the acts on a current or forthcoming programme. Smaller versions, with little or no artwork were known as "day bills," "hand bills," "flyers or "dodgers."
2. Vaudeville performers generally used the phrase "being on the bill" rather than "being on the programme."

NB: [Valantyne Napier](#) notes that the term "bill" has now been replaced by "poster." In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, however, "poster" actually referred to the person who pasted the bills. Few people today would know that being a bill poster was actually a professional occupation. In 1917, for example, there were over 700 members of Britain's United Bill Posters' Association (12).

BILLING: The size of the print and the position of the act's name on the bill denoted its billing or feature status in relation to other acts. It was also important in terms of dressing room allocation for those performers playing the major vaudeville circuits such as the [Harry Rickards Tivoli Theatres](#) or [J.C. Williamson's](#). Naturally the feature act was allocated the No 1 dressing room. [Valantyne Napier](#) provides additional insight into this aspect of the industry when she records that if the top billing was shared by say three acts, then the name on the left of the bill got the No 1 dressing room, the centre act got No 2 with the act on the right being relegated No 3. Other acts were given rooms depending on their position – middle to lower – and space (14).



[Sadler and Beveridge](#) **Vaudeville De Luxe**
Hobart (1914)
State Library of Tasmania

BLACKFACE: Also often referred to as "burnt cork" comedy, blackface was the most visual aspect of minstrelsy, a theatrical form genre acknowledged as the most significant performance tradition on the American stage for roughly 100 years beginning around 1830. It quickly became popular overseas, particularly so in Britain and Australia, where the tradition lasted longer than in the US. It was still being seen on primetime television in the 1960s and 1970s through the popular *Black and White Minstrel Show*. The concept behind the blackface comedy was to stereotype and caricature the black person. Interestingly some of the best known minstrel performers to appear on the Australian stage were themselves African Americans. Such men included [Sam Keenan](#), [Johnny Matlock](#), [Alf Moynham](#), [Charlie Pope](#) and [Irving Sayles](#). The caricaturing wasn't always one-way, however, with Pope being known to have once appeared on stage in "whiteface."



Billy Elliott
Green Room Apr. (1920), 19.

The make-up which was applied to create the "black face," an essential component of the end-man role, was traditionally a mush of grease and burnt cork, and hence the name "burnt cork" comedy. [Charles Norman](#) records that the process of preparing the black-face required that the performer first burn the corks and then float them in water until they were water-logged.

They would then squeeze out the water (a messy business) and fill up a jar with the mud-like black paste. Jo Mercer and Del Buchanan (grand-daughters of [Ted Tutty](#)) remember well the burning of the cork in a saucepan on a stove. They record too that Ted would apply cold cream to his face before the blackface. He would also use the same cold cream to remove the cork after the show.

While black-face entertainment began to disappear from [Harry Rickards'](#) programs from the mid-1890s it was still a popular part of vaudeville in Australia well into the late 1910s. While it still made appearances in the 1920s these productions were more often staged as a special "old time" show.

A popular variation on the blackface comic tradition was the Hebrew comic, who similarly applied a style of make-up that accentuated Jewish traits. Unlike the vast majority of white men who played black man role, however, most Hebrew comedians were actually of Jewish heritage. The best known Australian Hebrew comic was [Roy Rene](#) (aka "Mo").

- See also: **Minstrelsy • Sable Troupes • Ethiopian Entertainers • Hebrew Comedy**



African-American comedian Charlie Pope in "whiteface"
Theatre Nov. (1917), 11.

BONES: See [ENDMAN](#)

BOOKING: See [DATE](#)

BURLESQUE: A humorous theatrical form of entertainment involving parody and exaggeration which is both derived from and related to pantomime. Burlesque first emerged in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and like pantomime was largely associated with seasonal entertainment. An American form of burlesque began to develop during the 1860s and became infamous for its displays of female flesh and low comedy character types and humour.

A popular alternative to pantomime in Australia from the 1850s (particularly through the work of [W. M. Akhurst](#) and [Garnet Walch](#)), burlesque initially followed the English tradition. In many instances burlesque attributes were also infused into parts of a pantomime production. The influence of minstrel troupes gradually saw the genre take up the low comedy elements if not so much the sexual aspects. Australian minstrels burlesque productions were also generally much smaller and with lower production values than its American counterpart. The arrival of the [American Burlesque Company](#) in 1913 was a pivotal influence on the emergence of the Australian revusical.

- See also: [Genres](#) page.

CIRCUS: Related to vaudeville in a number of aspects, including both performance types (comedy, acrobatics and animal acts etc), circus was nevertheless not considered part of the variety industry. Indeed, few performers are known to have moved from one to the other during their careers, while the two "industries" operated wholly different industrial and social networks. One of the few circus performers to make a successful switch to vaudeville was Jim Gerald. Any circus performers to have been briefly engaged in vaudeville (e.g. [Con Colleano](#)) will likely be entered in the "Practitioners [Other] section.

CHORUS: Although vaudeville often included ensemble or singing acts there was no involvement by chorus girls (or chorus boys). The all female chorus was a pivotal part of the tradition of revues, musical comedy and

musical comedy. The number of performers comprising a revue, musical scene or musical comedy chorus depended on the individual needs of the production. The revues chorus, however, almost always numbered six. From around the 1930s/1940s the female chorus was referred to more as the "ballet" and the performers as "ballet girls." These terms were seldom applied in industry magazines or in newspapers during the 1910s and 1920s, however.



The Panama Six (from Nat Phillips' *Stiffy and Mo Revue Co.*)

Fryer Library, The University of Queensland
Nat Phillips Collection (UQFL9)

CHRISTY MINSTRELS: The original Christy's Minstrels was formed by Edwin Pearce Christy (1815-62) in Buffalo, New York, in 1843. The troupe performed in blackface, parodying the speech and mannerisms of African Americans. The format of the minstrel show was also developed by Christy. After he and his stepson, George Christy, retired from the troupe several of its members continued touring under the name. J. W. Raynor and Earl Pierce formed a new troupe, using many of the former Christy Minstrel members. It opened in London, England at the St. James's Theatre on 3 August 1857, billed as Raynor and Pierce's Christy Minstrels. The troupe's popularity was such that minstrelsy quickly spread throughout Great Britain, its colonies and Europe. By the early 1860s the terms "Christy" and "Original Christy" were being used by numerous minstrel troupes, few of which had any connection to either Edwin Christy's troupe or even to the USA. As a journalist writing for the *Geelong Advertiser* in 1863 notes:

New York is never without at least one company of Christys [and]... we notice that 'the original Christy's Minstrels' were singing every night in St James' Hall, Piccadilly. Perhaps like Farina's Eau de Cologne, Seidlitz's Powders, Epsom Salts, Burton Ale or bath Buns, the style and title of Christy's has been generic instead of specific" (26 Jan. 1863, 2).

- See also: **Minstrelsy • Ethiopian Entertainers • Sable Troupes**

COMIC LECTURE: Referred to in the USA as "stump speech," the comic lecture was a humorous monologue performed in blackface by a minstrel comic (typically one of the two endmen, or at least one of the principal comedians in the show). The topics of these lectures typically parodied politics, science, and social issues. One of the advantages of presenting a comic lecture in a minstrel show was that the performer could essentially deliver social commentary that might be considered taboo in another setting. Sometimes they were presented as purely nonsense. The "lecturer" might also make use of malapropisms (the substitution of a word for a word with a similar sound), nonsense sentences, and puns delivered in a parodied version of black vernacular English. Usually the highlight of the *olio* (the minstrel show's second act), the comic lecture was an important precursor to modern concept of stand-up comedy. There appears to have been little doubt in the minds of most mid to late 19th century commentators that the greatest Australian comic lecturer was [Horace W. Bent](#), while few would have argued against [Billy Emerson](#) being the most popular US "stump speech" comedian to visit the country.

- See next page for an example of a stump speech.

IF I MAY SO SPEAK

A BURLESQUE STUMP ORATION

Adapted and arranged expressly for Byron Christy, by J. B. Murphy

FELLER SITIZENS! and sitizen fellers: – In this momentous – yes, momentous cri-i-isis ob de country, when de tocsin ob war is sounding, or is gwine to be sounded froo-out de antipodeal and unlimited precincts ob dis vast continental continent, it behoves – yes, it *behooves*, “if I may

so speak” – every loyal and patriotic – yes, patriotic and loyal mother son of us to stand ready wid hands on his arms – yes, arms in his hands in magnanimous defence – of, “if I may so speak,” of the constitution; yes, of the constitution, and – so on!

As I suggested, there seems to be a disposition to fight; yes, to fight! And I say, *here*, standing upon the piney platform of – of – this stage, if there is any fighting to be did, then, in the language of the gifted – yes, the highly gifted and unterrified Scottish chief:

“Come one! Come all! this rock shall fly.
From its firm base” – in a pig’s eye, and so on.

But again, logically speaking – yes, speaking logically, I see one-half geographically and climatically, or in other words, climatically and geographically considered; yes one-half our glorious Union Slipping away – yes slipping into a – so to speak, an – a adumbruous chaosity; yes, chaosity – and so on.

Shall I stand here unmoved and gaze, “if I may so speak,” wid distended eyeballs – yes, wid eyeballs, at de red heel ob de soger – yes, at de heel ob de red soldier as tramples out de lifeblood ob my countrymen and coadgitors in a – so to speak – fratricidal and suicidal – yes, in a suicidal combat.

In the language of Patrick Henry – yes, of Henry Patrick, I say “no!” – yes, “no!” I know not what course others may take, but as for me give me liberty or give me lager bier, and so on.

But, as I suggested, we have lost, “if I may so speak,” our – our equilibrium and balance – yes, our balance pole, where, “if I may so speak,” where do we tend? Our proper position is to the zenith, with our hoary bird of freedom flopping his wings and soaring – yes, soaring to the fathomless azure of the fathomless azure – yes, to the azure of the lustrous firmament, radiated and bright – yes, bright, “if I may so speak,” with the glorious corruscations of innumerable constellations – yes, constellations of innumerable corruscations!

In the language of the noble bard:

“Earth shook! red meteors flash’d across the sky,
And conscious nature *shuddered* at the cry.
Hope for a season bade the world farewell,
And freedom screeched,”

as – yes, as freedom screeched, and so on.

But, again! as I suggested. It is, perhaps, or perhaps it is, “if I may so speak,” necessary that I should apologize for the latitudunosity – yes, for the tudionsity – dinosity – nosity ob my circumlocutory – locutory – cutory, the latitudinosity and of my “cution with which, “if I may so speak,” I have! and so on.

But, as I suggested previously, how can I, how can you; yes, how can you and I stand by, “if I may so speak,” and see the gigantic, yes, the gigantic and stupendous onslaught of a lot of swine-eyed and spavined – yes, spavined and ring-boned, and pot-house political politicians – upon the bullworks of our freedom – yes, the freedom of our bullworks. In the language of – of somebody, “What is it that gentlemen wish? what would they have?” I repeat it, and so on.

These are the ones who have got our liberty pole off its perpendicularity – yes, the perpendicularity of our pole off – off its dicularity – larity. And where now, “if I may so speak,” is the high bird of freedom – yes, the freedom of our high bird of liberty. Echo answers, yes she answers. Instead of spreading his noble pinions to soar beyond the regions of the – “if I may so speak,” of the boreal pole – yes, of the boreal pole, he’s driven far back to the primeval – yes, the primeval fastnesses – ess – ess-sees ob de gum trees of the west – yes, of the western gum trees; and there, I trust – yes, we all trust, he may soar and rest – and rest and soar, and flap his ponderous wings in the sunlight of freedom – yes, the freedom of sunlight, till the coming of that time, “if I may so speak,” so graphitically described and depicted – yes, depicted and described by the noble bard:

“When all the sister planets have decayed,

When wrapped in fire the realms of ether glow,

And heaven’s last thunder shakes the world below,

Thou undismayed, shall o’er the ruin smile;
And smile – and smile,” – and – and – so on.

COMPERE: (aka Em-Cee). While the first part of a minstrel show was built around a compere - the somewhat officious or straight "Mr Interlocutor" - the emergence of vaudeville in the 1880s (and in Australia around the mid -to-late 1890s) saw this role disappear. Up until the 1930s acts were "announced" via an easel situated by the side of the stage. Some of the more up-market companies also provided programs, and from the 1930s they utilised a system of lighted numbers on the proscenium arch to signify which act was up next.

The only exception to the non-use of a compere during the first three decades of the twentieth century was in the case of amateur or trial nights put on by the smaller suburban variety operations. Towards the end of the 1920s when the depression made vaudeville less economic some operators introduced a compere as a means of helping to cut back on a couple of acts.

- See also: **Interlocutor • Trial Nights**

CONJURER: See MAGIC ACTS

CONTORTIONISTS: Contortionism is an unusual form of physical display which involves an exaggerated and often seemingly impossible bending and flexing of the human body. Contortion acts were often incorporated into types of acrobatic performance rather than simply a display of flexibility. Some of the more popular acts were the *adagio* (a dance in which one partner lifts and carries the other partner as she/he performs a series of flexible poses); the *rag doll* or *golliwog* act (in which one or two assistants bend, shake and carry the contortionist in such a way as to convince the audience that the performer is a life-sized doll); the *Spanish Web* (an aerial act consisting of a rope with a hand/foot loop that is spun by someone underneath); and the *Spider's Web* (whereby the contortionist moves like a spider, often creeping in to devour a maiden trapped in his web). Some contortionists would also manipulate props like wine glasses, or play a musical instrument in unnatural positions.

Little Verlie . .
Australia's Premier
Child Contortionist
Is now open for Engagement
in conjunction with Lillian
Ross's FOUR NIPPERS or
THE TWO ROSSES.
For Vacant Dates apply
LILLIAN ROSS,
"Variety" Office, Sydney



Little Verlie



Hector Napier
World's News (no details)

COON ACTS: The coon act emerged out of the minstrel era and continued to be popular well into the 1910s. Although it eventually lost popularity by the 1920s, performers like **Maud Fanning** (whose career was built around this act) continued to revive it. The coon act, which typically involved "plantation-style comedy and/or singing (with the songs being both sentimental and comic), was performed by both white and men and white women alike. Some performers would stroll around the stage in front of hand-painted tableaux depicting scenes from the Deep South.



Coon singer Maud Fanning and children
Mitchell Library

In America it was not uncommon for female coon singers (both black and white performers) to hire a group of young and inexpensive African-American singer/dancers (usually aged between 6 to 12 years) to perform in their act as "piccaninies." The unavailability of black children in Australia (Aborigines don't appear to have been considered) saw this practice remain largely absent from the Antipodean stage, although it was not uncommon for the coon singer to bring her children on stage to perform similar duties. Some American touring companies are also believed to have included children in these roles

CORNERMEN: See ENDMEN

COSMORAMA: The word Cosmorama was initially used to designate an astronomical exhibition, but was later adopted as a synonym for a superior grade of peepshow. It was essentially an optical picture exhibition that consisted of a portable box with a lens at the front, and through which one looked. At the rear, and illuminated by some sort of light would be either one or two small paintings (two if the exhibition was in fact a stereoscopic one). On either side would be panels, creating a tunnel, and thus providing the spectator with the illusion of depth. By the early 1850s Cosmoramas had incorporated the two lens system in tandem with two pictures, thus creating their three-dimensional perspective. In subsequent years they were sometimes called Diorama or Panorama exhibitions. The first Cosmorama was opened in Paris in 1808, with a London exhibition opening for the first time in 1820.

Cosmoramas were still being exhibited in Australia up until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Harry Clay, for example, toured regional Queensland with one between 1901 and 1908. They were invariably described by the local newspapers as providing "stereoscopic views," and "illuminated scenes." A *Queensland Times* review of one show records that "through the agency of the Cosmorama patrons may have a peep at the views of London and Paris by night" (7 Apr. 1904, 9).

CYCLE ACTS: Turns built around cycles could involve any variety of wheeled machine and any number of performers. These acts were often derived from the circus and typically comprised acrobatics, with the performers undertaking amazing feats of skill while moving around the stage. The following description of The Theron Troupe (from the 1940s) provides an idea of the type of things these acts could perform:

The Theron Troupe (eight)... does everything but ride under water with its bikes. Eight abreast the unit rides its two-wheelers in unicycle formation. The same number pile on one bike for a ride. The leader of the troupe won big hands when he jumped rope with his bike, revolved his front wheel while riding and did a somersault with the two-wheeler.

Cycle acts such as [Whimsical Walker \[2\]](#), Alfonso, and the Newmans also often utilised trick or comic cycles. Other well-known acts included: The Kays, Keldine and Klima/Keldine and Speed, and The Krank.



CYCLORAMA: A 360° degree painting, cyclorama's were placed on the interior walls of a cylindrical room so as to appear in natural perspective to a spectator standing in the center of the room. The first cyclorama was painted and presented in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1787 (it also depicted a view of that city). By the mid-1800s 360° panoramic scenes of historic battles or great cities were being exhibited throughout the world in purpose built circular brick and iron buildings. They retained their popularity through until the arrival of cinema at the end of the 19th century. Melbourne during the late 1880s and early 1890s, for example, had at least three cycloramas *The Battle of Waterloo* and the *Eureka Stockade* in Victoria Parade, and *The Siege of Paris* in Little Collins Street.


Arguably the most famous Australian cyclorama was John [John Hennings'](#) painting based on Samuel Jackson's *Panoramic Sketch of Port Phillip* (1841). Commissioned in 1892 by the Victorian colonial government, and taking five months to complete, it continued to be exhibited in the eastern annex of the Exhibition Building up until 1918.

The term cyclorama can also refer to a cloth stretched tight in an arc around the back of a stage set to provide a greater sense of depth to a scene. Popular in pantomimes or extravaganzas for depicting the sky or under-water scenes) this form of cyclorama was also sometimes used for spectacular vaudeville acts, especially those which were presented in silhouette (as with [Hector Napier's](#) "The Human Spider").

CYCLORAMA

Opposite RAILWAY STATION SYDNEY.

ILLUSIONS, CINEMATOGRAPH, Etc., Etc.



THE HUMAN BUTTERFLY.



DAPHNE, the Floating Lady, returns after 3 years.


Magic, Mirth, Mystery, Music, and Marvellous Realism.

THE TURMOIL OF BATTLE.

Latest Improved PROFESSIONAL CHRONO-CINEMATOGRAPH.

A REMARKABLE COMBINATION.

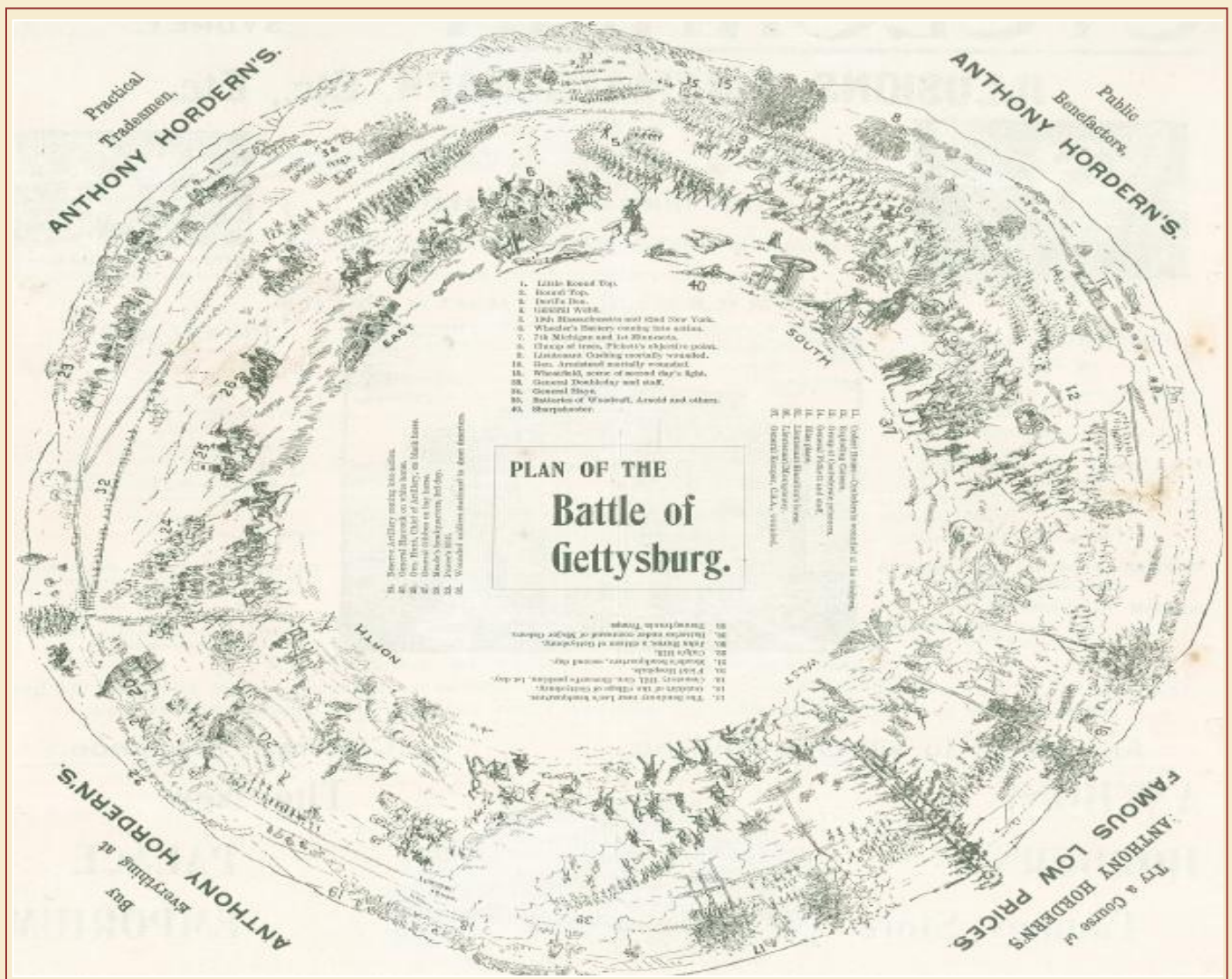
The Battle of Gettysburg
FOUGHT WITH FIRING, STORM, AND CARROUS ROARING
WITH FULL BAND EVERY NIGHT.
HALL OF ILLUSIONS...
AND OTHER SCENES
Wonderful Living Pictures just from London and Paris
The only Machine free from Sickness.
DAPHNE Floating Lady, returns after three years.
HUMAN BUTTERFLY...
And other Floating Beauties and Wonderful Illusions.



THE CYCLORAMA IS OPEN FROM 10 A.M. TO 1.30 P.M. AND 7 TO 10 P.M.

Cinematographic or Living Pictures are now being made a Specialty at the Cyclorama. Just imported, the best machine made, the "Professional Chrono," with new Films, and fresh ones coming by every mail.

Admission to all, One Shilling. Children, Sixpence.



Sydney Cyclorama (ca. 1890s)
AVTA Collection



A slice of the Battle of Gettysburg (conservation version)
Originally painted by Paul Philippoteaux in the late 1880s.
Gettysburg Foundation

DAME: The stage tradition of having men play a female roles stretches back to the earliest days of the theatre. For centuries this was required because women were in many Western countries were legally unable to appear on the stage. Even when English law changed in the late 1600s allowing women to become stage actresses the convention of men playing women, and particularly old women, continued. While the custom almost disappeared from the stage by the late 1700s it nevertheless found renewed popularity in pantomime. During the earliest English productions men played a variety of female roles including witches and old women roles such as Mother Goose and Mother Shipton. Over time, however, the comical old dame became a staple of pantomime.

The dame was traditionally played by an established male comedian. The actors would typically be costumed with a large wig, heavy make-up and exaggerated physical features. They also tended to perform in a melodramatic style that as either camp or butch. Some famous Australian or Australian-based dames included: Bert Gilbert, Jim Gerald, Dan Thomas, Barry Lupino and Jack "Porky" Kearns.



Edwin Brett as Cogia Baba
The Forty Thieves, Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne (1913)
Viola Tait. *Dames, Principal Boys... And all That* (2001).

DANCE ACTS: Dances acts, as with comedians and singers, were a mainstay of both minstrelsy and vaudeville. The range of types and styles presented were numerous and ranged over time from classical ballet through to jazz and eccentric dancers. Arguably the most popular styles during the mid to late 1800s were "the grotesque" and "clog" dancers.



Clogging, which was social dance in the Appalachian Mountains as early as the 18th century, can be considered the first form of street dance in that it evolved in urban environments during the industrial revolution. Grotesque dancers were typically loose-legged comedians who threw them-selves about the stage in some form of rhythmic dancing. In later years the term grotesque was replaced by "eccentric" while clog dancing gave way to tap.

Other popular dance styles and forms performed in the variety stage included: cakewalk, ballroom, knockabout (acrobatic), the Tango, the Charleston, and song and dance acts.



"The Vampire Dance"
Theatre Magazine Nov. (1915), 39.

Moon and Morris (the world's greatest back to back dancers)
Green Room June (1919), 12.

- See also: **Serpentine Act** • **Fads & Fashions (Dance)**

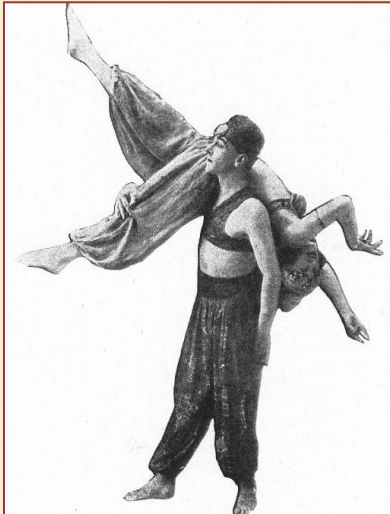
DATE: The term used by professional variety artists instead of "booking."

DENTAL ACTS: Aerial Acts in which the performer(s) gripped ropes or other objects with their teeth instead of legs or arms were referred to as "dental acts." One popular troupe to work both in wire and as a dental act during the mid-1910s was the Aerial Dentines.

DIABLO ACTS: Diablo acts, which reached their highest levels of popularity on the vaudeville stage between the mid-1910s and the late 1920s, involved the manipulation of objects on a string attached to two hand-held sticks.

DIGGER TROUPES: From around 1916 onwards a number of concert parties were formed by the Australian and New Zealand armed forces in order to entertain their soldiers (aka "diggers") stationed in various parts of Europe. Some of these troupes were known as the [Anzac Coves](#), the [Kangaroos](#), the [Green Diamonds](#) and the [Cooees](#). When finally demobilised these troupes turned their attention to civilian audiences, and subsequently began touring the antipodean and international vaudeville circuits. Initially the troupes comprised an all male line-up, with one or more performers taking on the female roles. While women were eventually included in some of the troupes, the tradition of having male impersonators did not disappear altogether. The popularity of these companies was due very much to a combination of the public's desire to celebrate the heroism of the soldiers and their need to be entertained by topical subjects that were war-related. As an *Argus* reviewer noted in 1920, however, "the Diggers wisely refrain from laying stress upon the war element (19 July 1920, 8). As the war gradually receded from the public's uppermost memory, and new entertainment and economic diversions increased their presence, most of the digger companies also gradually faded away.

Arguably the most successful and longest lasting digger company was the [Famous Diggers](#) (also known as [Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers](#)). It initially formed as the New Zealand Digger Pierrots (as most of the troupe performed in pierrot costumes). Other prominent companies included the [Smart Set Diggers](#) and the [All Diggers Company](#) (also known as the Mademoiselle Mimi Diggers, after its most popular show).



L: **Tiki Carpenter (Smart Set Diggers)** (being carried)
Green Room Feb. (1923), 12.

R: **NZ Digger Pierrots and Orchestra, 1917**
National Library of
New Zealand



DIRECTOR: The terms director and producer in Australia during the period covered by the AVTA were the inverse of the roles we understand them to be today. Hence a "producer" prior to the mid-1930s effectively looked after the staging – ensuring the quality and completeness of the production and leading the members of the creative team into realising an artistic vision. The phrase "under the direction of," referred to the role we typically associate today with that of the producer (a person involved with financing and originating the production and who oversees such things as promotion, hiring key personnel and negotiating with legal and other associated people and organisations.

The AVTA uses the terms director and producer as they are understood today (except whenever part of a direct quotation)

DISEUSE: A female artiste who entertains with spoken monologues.

DODGERS: Also known as hand bills or flyers, the term dodger was largely used to describe a form of leaflet advertising that was utilised by small-time vaudeville managers (and especially for regional or suburban tours). The dodgers were typically delivered to local houses and businesses by children who would receive free tickets to shows in return.

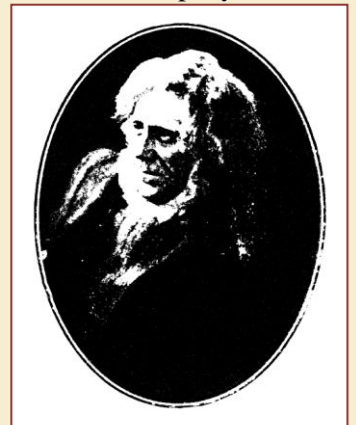
- See also: **Bill**

DRAMATIC ACTS: The popularity of minstrelsy, pantomime and vaudeville variety entertainment in Australia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw many actors from the "legitimate" stage cross over, if only temporarily and to the variety stage at various times during their careers. Actors from the 1880s and 1890s like [Harry Leston](#) and [Kate Howarde](#), for example, not only appeared in pantomime but sometimes wrote, produced and appeared in burlesques and farces.



Roy Redgrave
Courtesy of redgrave.com

In the 1910s and 1920s esteemed character actors like [Roy Redgrave](#) and [John Cosgrove](#) used their thespian skills to present short dramatic sketches to vaudeville audiences. The term "protean artiste" (meaning a very versatile performer) was often applied to these individuals. In 1914, for example, [Harry Clay](#) produced the Australian premier production of John Lawson's 30 minute dramatic sketch, "Humanity" at his newly built Bridge Theatre.² So popular was it that he immediately formed Clay's Dramatic Company to present an extended season of drama at the theatre, with the early 1915 performances starring [Harry Leston](#). Roy Redgrave's Sketch Company also appeared on [Fullers](#) and Clay's circuits in 1915 and 1917 respectively. John Cosgrove is known to have worked for Clay in 1908 (including that year's Queensland vaudeville tour), as well as in 1915 and 1917.

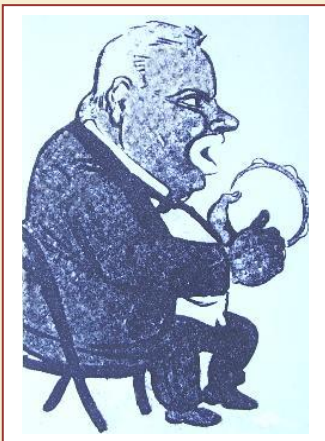


Clement May
Australian Variety 1 Apr.
(1914), cover.

ECCENTRIC DANCING: See DANCE ACTS • LEGMANIA

EM-CEE (MC): See COMPERE • INTERLOCUTOR

ENDMEN: aka **Cornermen** The endmen of a minstrel show, called Mr Tambo and Mr Bones, were almost always the most experienced comedians in the troupe. Positioned at the far end of the minstrel semi-circle (the first part of the evening's entertainment), the two comedians typically presented themselves as simple-minded and unsophisticated. This persona, however, belied their quick-wit and ability to work the audience into a frenzy of laughter. In this respect Tambo and Bones were favorites of the audience, and their repartee with the more austere and grandiose interlocutor (aka master of ceremonies) was for many the best part of the show.



It was not uncommon for some minstrel shows to present a double endman team (two Tambos and two Bones). While most leading Australian-based comedians of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries worked as an endman at some stage of their career (with some also playing Mr Interlocutor), the greatest locally-born exponent between the 1860s and 1890s was arguably [Horace W. Bent](#).

Jack "Porky" Kearns as Mr Tambo
From Isadore Brodsky *Sydney Looks Back* (1962).

² For further details see [Dissertations](#) - "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company," Ch.. 3, 65-66; or the "Bridge Theatre" entry in [Theatres \[New South Wales\]](#) (Sydney Suburbs section).

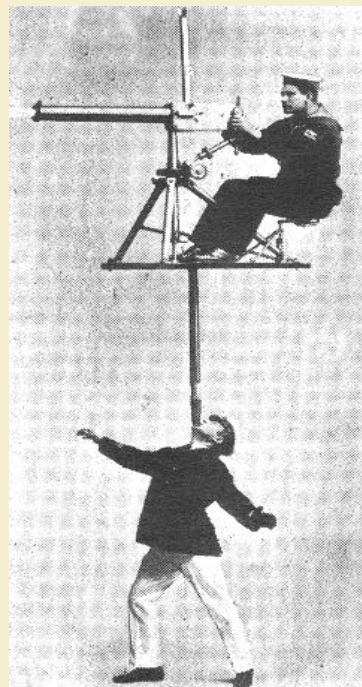


An up-market minstrel show from 1910 with double endmen
Wikipedia.

EQUILIBRISTS: Balancing acts were invariably billed as "equilibrists" and typically included athletic poses and displays of athleticism. Among Australia's best known exponents of this type of entertainment during the 1910s and 1920s were "[Balmus](#)" (aka Walter Wheatley), Max Balto (billed simply as "Balto" or Balto the daredevil), Bates and Wade, the Eclair Brothers, Charles Edenbury and La Rose and La Rose (who presented a turn comprising comedy acrobatics, balancing and trapeze).



Brinn
Balancing Gun Carriage and Cannon on his Chin
Tivoli Theatre (Sydney)
Theatre Magazine Aug. (1906), 6.



Brinn
Balancing Man and Quick-firing Gun on Chin
– Gun in Action
Tivoli Theatre (Sydney)
Theatre Magazine Aug. (1906), 19.

ESCAPOLOGISTS: See ILLUSIONISTS

ETHIOPIAN: The term "Ethiopian" was a generic description and often-used name for blackface troupes and ensembles during the early minstrel era (ca. 1840s to 1870s). It came into use as a generalised means of describing people who relating to, or characteristic of the inhabitants or the country of Ethiopia, and in particular blackface minstrel entertainers.



ALBERT THEATRE.
THE public are respectfully informed, that the season at the above place of amusement will shortly terminate.
On Monday next, the 7th instant, a Benefit will take place, the proceeds of which will be appropriated exclusively to decorate and embellish the Theatre during the recess. Several old favorites and gentlemen amateurs have kindly offered their services on the occasion.
The performances will commence with the much-admired Melo-drama, which was performed at the London Theatres upwards of 100 nights with the most unbounded applause, entitled **THE HARP OF ALTENBERG.**
Master Wright (the Infant Prodigy) and Signor Blitz will appear in the Interlude, and the Ethiopian Serenaders will introduce the American Melodies which were received in London with the most enthusiastic applause.
The whole to conclude with the truly laughable farce of **THE SIAMESE TWINS.**
Vivat Regina.
August 4, 1848. 1869

Earliest known Ethiopian Serenaders performance in Australia.
Colonial Times (Hobart) 4 Aug. 1848, 1

The first troupe known to have billed itself as the Ethiopian Serenaders had previously toured as the Boston Minstrels (ca. 1843). For its appearance at the White House in 1844 as part of the "Especial Amusement of the President of the United States [John Tyler], His Family and Friends," the troupe had changed its name to Ethiopian Serenaders. In 1846 the troupe undertook a tour in England and found much success with British audiences, especially at St James's Theatre, London. Other troupes soon began using the name in both America and Britain, and a little later in Australia. In *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask* (1999), William John Mahar has identified at least seven US troupes working under the name Ethiopian Serenaders between 1843 and 1851 alone (356). In most instances the name of the troupe's leader(s) or a distinctive term would be inserted so as to distinguish it from other Ethiopian companies. American-based companies to use the term in their names included Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders, Christy's Ethiopian Serenaders, Ethiopian Warblers, Original Ethiopian Minstrels, Confederate Ethiopian Serenaders (an African-American troupe), Ethiopian Melodists, and New Orleans Ethiopian Serenaders.

In Australia the first ensemble to use the name [Ethiopian Serenaders](#) [1] has been identified as performing at a benefit in Hobart on 7 August 1848. While no details relating to its line-up or later engagements is currently known, it was unlikely to have been a minstrel troupe. Over the next couple of decades literally dozens, perhaps even a hundred or more Australian and touring international minstrel ensembles billed themselves as Ethiopian Serenaders (or as variants of that name). Those identified to date include: The Four Ethiopian Serenaders (1849), Amateur Ethiopian Serenaders (various troupes), Howard's Ethiopian Serenaders (ca. 1853), Rainer's Ethiopian Serenaders (ca. 1853), Juvenile Ethiopian Serenaders (ca. 1851), and Haymonson's Ethiopian Serenaders (ca. 1873). [Blythe Waterland's Sereneaders](#) (ca. 1850) was also sometimes billed or referred to as Blythe Waterland's Ethiopian Serenaders

- See also: [Blackface](#) • [Minstrelsy](#) • [Minstrel Show](#) • [Sable](#)

FEED: See [STRAIGHTMAN](#)

FARCE: A comic dramatic work using buffoonery, slap stick and horseplay, the farce typically involves crude, stereotypical characterisations and ludicrously improbable situations.

- See also: [Minstrel Farce](#)

FINALE: The term finale was not used to denote the end of the minstrel show program but rather the completion of the first part minstrel semi-circle. After each of the performers had presented their act, the company presented its finale as a "walk around," a performance that typically involved a song and/a dance. The finale usually began as a series of solo dances as each performer tried to outdo the others. Finally, all the dancers broke ranks and danced the minstrel show into an intermission.

There was no finale in a vaudeville show.

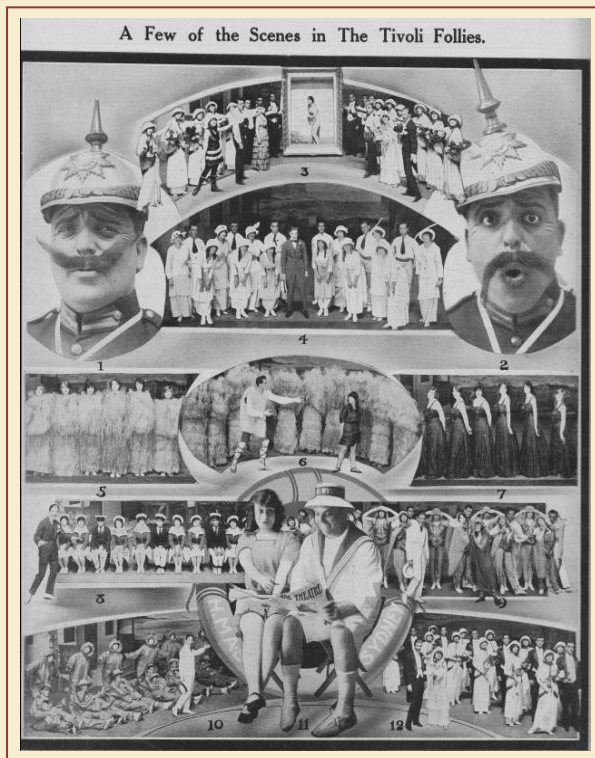
- See also: [Minstrel Show](#)

FIRE CURTAIN: A heavy steel and asbestos curtain separating the backstage area from the auditorium, the fire curtain (right) gradually became a requirement for most theatres around the world following the disastrous fire which killed several hundred patrons at the Ring Theatre, Vienna, in 1881. In Australia by the early twentieth century the fire curtain (also known as a safety curtain) was required to be lowered and raised before each performance to ensure that it was in working order.



FIRE EATERS: A part of Hindu, Sadhu and Fakir ceremonies (the intention being to show the participant's spiritual attainment), fire eating in the West is known to have occurred as far back as the late 1600s. Englishman Robert Powell, arguably one of the greatest exponents of the art, gained acclaim for more than 60 years beginning around 1700s. Fire eating eventually became a popular act for sideshows, circus and variety, with its first practitioners presenting it on the latter stage as early as the 1880s. A popular act which performed fire eating in Australia during the 1910s was the Ali Bux Troupe.

FOLLIES: A form of a theatrical performance that hybridised revue, musical extravaganza and vaudeville, the follies comprised individual sections featuring music, dancing and comedy, but staged with greater production values in terms of elaborate and lavish costumes, sets and musical performance etc. The Follies concept was introduced to Australia during World War I by Hugh D. McIntosh. Billed as the Tivoli Follies, and based on the format perfected by Charles B. Cochran (Britain) and Florenz Ziegfeld (USA), these shows were initially a huge success for McIntosh, touring Australia and New Zealand for some two and a half years. Among the most popular wartime Tivoli performers were [Vera Pearce](#) and comedian [Jack CANNOT](#) (right with Kaiser helmet).



Although the shows later struggled due to the productions costs and competition from the more down-market revusical genre which had begun to attract a wider, popular culture market, the Follies nevertheless continued to be a Tivoli institution over the coming decades. In 1930, for example, the Tivoli Follies, featuring [Ada Reeve](#), undertook a national tour that last well into 1931.

- See [Genre](#) ("Follies" section)

Theatre Magazine Jan. (1915), 49.

FRONT OF HOUSE: Front of house (abbreviated FOH) typically refers to the part of a theatre or venue that is open to the public (i.e. the doors to the auditorium and foyer). The front of house manager and tour manager were essentially one and the same, with the position playing a significant part in the success or failure of a company. A good tour/front of house manager needed to have an excellent memory for faces and names, as well as details about the locals or regulars. While on tour he would also need to have good lines of communication with both head office (if there was one) and the advance rep so as to keep abreast of the latest news and information.

Tour managers like [Jimmy Boyle](#) and later [Wally Edwards](#) (who both worked managed [Harry Clay](#)'s Queensland tours for many years), or city-based front of house managers like [Bill Sadler](#) were not only invaluable to their employers but in some cases had reputations that were equal to the best-known Australian performers. Furthermore, anyone of them could also be relied on to do a turn at short notice if an act cancelled their appearance.

GAGS: A comedian's term for a joke, a comedic sketch or routine, the gag could be verbal or visual.

"GIVING THE BIRD": The connotations behind this saying, although differing slightly in their manifestation between various countries, essentially refer to the same thing – disapproval. In America to give someone the bird is to "give them the finger" - i.e. the obscene gesture of anger, defiance, or derision made by pointing or jabbing the middle finger upward (it's also often referred to as "flipping the bird." A 1926 *Everyone's* article, "Trial Turns: Acts the Regular Audiences Don't See" sums up the practice in Australia:

Every Australian vaudeville patron understands the meaning of the term "getting the bird." For the benefit of those whose education must have been sadly neglected, it is here explained that "giving the bird" is the audience's polite (?) way of intimating to a performer that his services are no longer required, and that they have no further desire to hear evidence regarding his skill as an entertainer. The bird is given in various ways - by the count out, by throwing pennies on the stage, and by the more vulgar method of heaving at the unfortunate artists vegetable long past their prime (30 June 1926, 9).

GREASEPAINT: The theatrical term for stage make-up, greasepaint essentially refers to the preparation of grease mixed with colorings. Sticks of various coloured greasepaint are applied over a cold cream base. Variety performers in most instances applied their own greasepaint, and it was rarely made to look exaggerated or caricature-like.

- See also: **Blackface**

GROTESQUE DANCING: See: DANCE ACTS • LEGMANIA

HEBREW COMEDIAN/COMEDY: The term "Hebrew" was used to refer to performers and acts which were based on Jewish idiosyncrasies and cultural traits. This form of comedy gained its greatest popularity in Australia during the 1910s and 1920s. One of the greatest influences on the style of performance was American entertainer [Julian Rose](#), perhaps best known for his song and sketch "Lavinsky at the Wedding."



[Roy Rene](#) (left), arguably Australia's greatest-ever Hebrew comedian, is first believed to adopted his ethnic stage persona around 1912, before cementing his place in the country's theatre history by adopting the name "Mo" (1916).

In 1913, another influential variety performer, [Bert Le Blanc](#) (right) arrived in Australia with the [American Burlesque Company](#), and over the next decade or so carved out a hugely successful career based on his heavily-accented Yiddish alter ego Ike Cohen (and often in partnership with the equally popular [Jake Mack](#) as his Hebrew off-sider Morris Levi). Other well-known Australian Hebrew comedians from the 1910s and 1920s were [Dan Thomas](#) and [Charles "Ike" Delavale](#).



Theatre Magazine June (1913), 1.

HOUSE: The term used to refer to the auditorium. A "full house" therefore indicates that the show for that session has been sold out.

ILLUSIONISTS:



While "illusionist" and "magician" might appear to be interchangeable, the first term applies more to large-scale, or more extravagant, stage shows. This type of magic is distinguished by large-scale props, the use of assistants and often exotic animals such as elephants and tigers. One particular form of illusion that became hugely popular on the Australian variety stage was escapology, with local artists including Hanco.

Among the most popular illusionist acts to play the Australian stage during the pre-1930s were [Houdini](#), [Chu Ling Soo](#) (aka William Robinson) and world-renowned Australian magician [Les Levante](#).

Les Levante (aka Les Cole)
State Library of Victoria

- See also: **Magicians • Mentalists and Mesmerism**

ILLUSTRATED SINGERS: One of the features of Australian minstrel shows beginning around the turn of the century was the illustrated song. These turns involved a rendition of one or more songs (usually patriotic, sentimental or nostalgic) in front of background scenery, mood visuals which were created initially through the use of limelight and slides, and thrown onto a large screen. A dissolving effect was also able to be produced, which reportedly made scenes such as snow storms even more beautiful and realistic (this was achieved by manipulating the intensity of the heat on the lime block. Essentially a fore-runner to the modern day "video clip," illustrated songs were usually performed by one of the company's star performers.

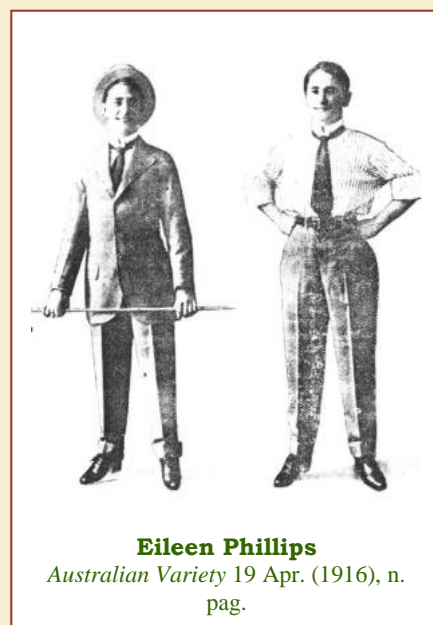
The projection of the images was operated through an oxy-ether lantern which flashed the pictures onto the screen. In many instances, however, venues would have to extinguish all gas equipment while the limelight lanterns were in operation. By 1910 it is believed the visuals for the illustrated songs were being screened by the film projector. [For further details see "[Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company](#)," 1998 MA Thesis, Chapter 5, 114-115; and Appendix C, 89]

- See also: **Limelight**

IMPERSONATORS: Impersonators, both male and female, didn't just dress in the attire of the opposite sex but rather presented a thorough and precise character study. The act would also invariably include some type of performance, including any combination of such skills as singing, dancing, the playing of an instrument, or patter and jokes.

Among the most famous Australian male impersonators of the pre-1930s were [Nellie Kolle](#), [Effie Fellows](#) and Bessie Phillips, who worked in partnership with her "female" sister, Eileen, as the [Phillip Sisters](#).

Female impersonation has long been a tradition of the theatre, and was popular both in minstrel burlesques and vaudeville, as well as pantomime (with one of the principal characters being the "dame," traditionally played by a male comic). One of the greatest female impersonators to be associated with the Australian stage around the turn of the century was [John F. Sheridan](#), perhaps best known for his creation the "Widow O'Brien." While this type of character delineation never disappeared from the vaudeville stage, it did have a quite significant revival in the 1920s through with the emergence of the "digger" troupes – notably [Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers](#) and the [All Diggers Company](#). Among the best of the impersonators at this time were Stan Lawson (Famous Diggers), Lindsay Kemble (All Digger Cos) and [Tiki Carpenter](#) and [Charles Holt](#) ([Smart Set Diggers](#)). Frederick Whitlow of the Smart Set Diggers was also a notable female impersonator, but his cross-dressing was meant to be comic rather than intended to deceive.



Eileen Phillips

Australian Variety 19 Apr. (1916), n. pag.

IMPRESSIONISTS: Impressionists were actors or singers who presented an act based on someone famous. While this style of performance really came into vogue in the mid-1930s following the introduction of the microphone (thus allowing the performer to provide subtle nuances of voice that were lost when "projecting" to the back of the hall), it was a part of the vaudeville show long before. Charlie Chaplin was a favourite choice for impressionists during the late 1910s and early 1920s, with the [Delavale Brothers](#) (Ern Delavale and Ern Vockler), for example, presenting a "funniosity" called "Chaplinitis" around 1918. Ern Vockler was the specialist Chaplin impressionist. During the early years of the First World War, too, the German Kaiser came in for special (satirical) attention, particularly at the hands of comedian [Jack Cannot](#).



Ern Vockler "Australia's Chaplin"

Australian Variety 10 May (1916), front cover.

Impressionism also includes portraying well-known fictional characters. Actor [Clement May](#), for example, built a very successful vaudeville career presenting monologues (in character) from Dickens' novels. [Lawrence Campbell](#) specialized in presenting characters from C. J. Dennis' *Songs of the Sentimental Bloke* (as did [Arthur Tauchert](#) following his 1919 film portrayal).

INTERLOCUTOR: The first part of a minstrel show involved the members of the troupe, including chorus, sitting on the stage in a semi-circle, with Mr Bones and Mr Tambo seated at either end. In the centre was the compere (or master of ceremonies) known as Mr Interloctor. His role was to not only introduce each of the members of the company prior to their solo performance (usually a sentimental or comic song and/or dance), but to also keep the proceedings running smoothly and in a refined manner. To this end his attempts were always thwarted by the Mr Bones and Mr Tambo.

While the role of interlocutor was played in blackface (as with the other performers), his demeanor was presented as somewhat aristocratic. Eric Lott (*Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*) uses the term "a codfish aristocrat" to describe this character. With the lower level touring troupes it was not uncommon to find the troupe leader or manager (unless they were a recognised comedian/endman) taking on the role of Mr Interlocutor as audiences more readily accepted the association between the two roles. During his early Queensland and Sydney operations, for example, [Harry Clay](#) invariably took on the role.

- See also: **Minstrel Show • Endmen**

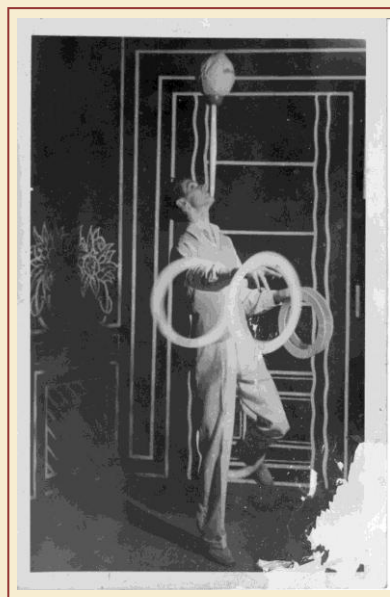
JUGGLING ACTS: Anything that could possibly be juggled was at some stage attempted and mastered during the years covered by this archive, with the weight of the objects ranging from feathers to cannonballs. As with singing, dancing and comedy, juggling was a mainstay of vaudeville. Juggling acts could comprise any combination of people from one upwards and be performed under a wide variety of conditions.

The classical form of juggling, and arguably the best known, is referred to as toss juggling, whereby a number of objects are thrown into the air and caught without them touching the ground. Bounce juggling involves the repeated bouncing of objects (usually balls) off the ground, while contact juggling sees the performer manipulate the object(s) while they remain in constant contact with the body.

Former Russian secret service agent and vaudeville juggler Zakaree Ermakov spent some time in Australia during the mid-late 1910s performing his act which included tossing Slavic weapons like battle axes, Tartar cavalry swords, Cossack lances and bayoneted rifles.

Some Australian juggling acts included: [Frank, Lank and Alice](#), The Hyman-Urens. Among the greatest, and most popular, jugglers to tour the Australasian region were [Paul Cinquevalli](#) and [W. C. Fields](#).

Unidentified juggler
Fryer Library, The University of Queensland
Nat Phillips Collection (UQFL9)



JUMPING ACTS: This act typically involved performers leaping or jumping in, out, on, over and through objects and devices – including rings, barrels, trampolines and ropes.

JUVENILE ACTS: Juvenile acts were a significant part of the pre-1930s variety industry. The nature of the industry, which demanded that people move almost constantly around the country meant that many performers invariably became attached to another performer of the opposite sex (and typically also formed a stage partnership that allowed them to tour together. The children of these performers were also required to tour almost from birth, and not surprisingly many of them began appearing on the stage from an early age.



Up until the first decade of the twentieth century there were virtually no restrictions regarding the age of children appearing on stage in their own act or as part of a partnership, and hence juvenile performers like [Sadie Gale](#) grew up performing. Numerous juvenile troupes also toured during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, none more popular and successful than the various [Pollards](#) companies.

Sadie and Sam Gale (better known as Gale and Little Sadie)
Theatre Magazine Feb. (1913), 19.

Eventually Child Welfare Regulations began to be introduced thus restricting the age of children (although the laws differed somewhat between the various states). Gale's parents, Sam and Myra, found for example, that they were unable to perform in NSW for almost a year because their daughter was under the age required in that state, so were forced to play elsewhere in the meantime.

Juveniles performers were more commonly contortionists, equilibrists, singers and dancers.

- See also: [Troupes: Juvenile Companies](#)

Verna Bain
Theatre Magazine Feb. (1914), 37.



KNOCKABOUT ACTS: Usually performed by two male comedians, a "knockabout act" primarily involved a combination of slapstick humour and acrobatic or rough physical displays by one or both performers. Other aspects of the performance might also include patter, singing and dancing (typically "eccentric" or "grotesque"). A common theme was the drunk (or two drunks) who fell about the stage, using props such as chairs, tables, ladders etc.

Among the more popular Australian knockabout comedy duos were [McKisson and Kearns](#) (Albert McKisson and Jack Kearns) and [Morris and Wilson](#) (Joe Morris and Alf Wilson) in the 1890s/early 1900s; and [Dinks and Oncus](#) (Jack Paterson and George Wallace) in the early 1920s. Other well-known knockabout comedians included: the circus-trained [Jim Gerald](#), [Clyde Cook](#) and [Arthur Tauchert](#) (best remembered today as the star of *The Sentimental Bloke*).

The "knockabout" comedy style can be seen in the film work of physical comedians like Buster Keaton, the Keystone Cops and Charlie Chaplin.

LEGMANIA: A term applied to acts that featured eccentric (or "loose-legged") dancing and/or funny walks. This style of performance, a long tradition of minstrelsy that dates back to the "Jim Crow" origins of minstrelsy, was mostly referred to in the mid-to-late 19th century as "grotesque" dancing. Eccentric dancers usually tended to be tall and with long legs. This tradition has continued to be a popular form of entertainment despite its long history. British comedian John Cleese, for example, popularised it again in the 1960s with his *Monty Python* sketch "The Ministry of Funny Walks."

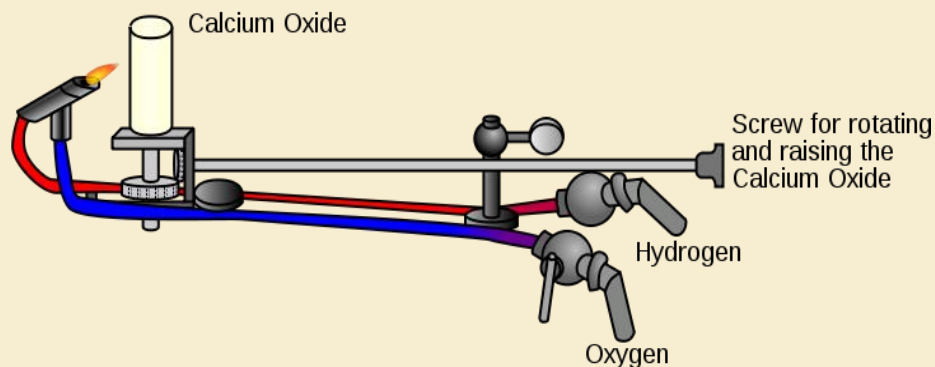


Chic Arnold and Charles Norman
Charles Norman When Vaudeville was King (1983), 69.

LIGHTNING SKETCH ACTS: An act which saw the performer produce the likeness of famous or topical people with a few deft lines of drawing was called a Lightning sketch act. Two of the more skillful Australian-based performers of the 1920s were [Pat Hanna](#) and [George Wallace](#).

LIMELIGHT: The term "limelight" as in "he stole the limelight," originates from the 1820s invention of lime (or calcium) lighting for the stage. The process of directing an oxyhydrogen flame at a cylinder of quicklime (calcium oxide) results in the formation of molecular water which releases a lot of heat, which in turn causes the calcium oxide to light up producing a combination of incandescence and candoluminescence). Curved mirrors were then used to focus the light onto any part of the stage required. The light produced was referred to as "limes."

Slides could also be used to create the visual images. By manipulating the intensity of the heat on the lime block effects such as dissolving scenes etc could also be achieved. Limelight operating required considerable attention, as the calcium block needed constant adjustment, as did the cylinders of oxygen and hydrogen. Prior to the advent of cylinders, these gasses were transported in canvas bags, which according to reports, tended to leak all too often. Manipulating these bags meant that the operator had to squeeze them with his feet under pressure boards. Sometimes, however, audience members standing or seated next to the planks would inadvertently apply added pressure to the gasses, causing various problems for the operator such as extra light. By the late 19th century limelight was replaced by the electric arc.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Theresa Knott (original drawing); Pbroks13 (redraw)

- **LIME BOYS:** The manipulators of the limes or spotlights, these specialist early lighting operators were not children but rather experienced adults (sometimes as old as 50 or 60). Their job was to direct the lime light onto the act, following the performer(s) as they moved about the stage. The most difficult aspect was to focus a pin-spot light on fast moving artists such as acrobats.
- **LIME BOX:** The small room at the back of the auditorium (usually high above the gallery) and from which the limes or spotlights were operated.

LIVING MODELS: See POSING

MAGIC ACTS: Sometimes referred to as stage magic (so as to distinguish it from paranormal or ritual magic), the magic act was another mainstay of variety entertainment, and particularly vaudeville. Its proponents, referred to as either magicians or illusionists, entertained their audiences by staging tricks or creating illusions of seemingly impossible or supernatural feats, but through the use of purely natural means. It was not uncommon for performers to be referred to by names that reflected the type of magic that featured in their act – with these terms including, for example, conjurors, mentalists and escape artists. Australian magic acts included [Emile Lazern](#) (right) and [Les Levante](#).



Everyone's 12 Dec. (1928), 132.

MENTALISTS AND MESMERISM:


Dr. RICHARD ROWE
HYPNOTIST
Clairvoyant and Fortune Teller

MYSTIC MOIRA
The following Programme will be played before the public during the coming Year:-

- 1.—Magical Effects with Coins, Cards, etc.
- 2.—Comedy Cabinet Act.
- 3.—Theatrical Sketch: "The Ballysham Buddhists."
- 4.—Japanese Self, Painting and Spectacular Show, with Color and Scenic Changes.
- 5.—"How Gamblers Win": A complete exposure of the methods of Sharpers—Gives on Stage.
- 6.—Sonambulist's Dream Visions (Past, Present, and Future), and the Great Chess Problem.
- 7.—Hypnotic Electric Art.

DR. ROWE and MOIRA.

DR. ROWE and subjects selected from Audience.



Mystic Moira, the Clairvoyant, answers questions written and retained in your own possession during the whole of the evening. Questions may relate to mining, racing, murder, robberies, fires, lost relations, past, present and future events. When in doubt, ask her. The only Act of its kind in Australasia.

Australian Variety 22 Dec. (1915), n. pag.

A specialist form of magic/illusionism, the role of the mesmerist is to create the impression in the minds of the audience that he or she possesses special powers to read thoughts, predict events, control other minds, and similar feats.

Mesmeric performers toured the nineteenth century music hall and vaudeville circuits, presenting sensational entertainment often under the guise of scientific demonstration. Charles Lafontaine, for example, used mesmerism to render his subjects impervious to pain, electrocuting them with batteries and burning them with candles to prove it. James Braid, the founding father of modern clinical hypnosis, developed an interest in the subject after seeing a Lafontaine performance in Manchester in 1841. This crossover between stage and clinical hypnosis has continued right up to the present day.

One of the most popular acts on the Australian variety stage for several decades was [Dr Richard Rowe](#) (aided by Mystic Moira). His act in 1915 included, for example, demonstrations of magic effects (using coins and cards etc), a comedy cabinet act, an illusion sketch ("The Ballysham Buddhists"), a lecture on "How Gamblers Win," a "Sonambulist's Dream Visions" segment," and a "Hypnotic Electric Act" (utilizing subjects from the audience).

MIMICS: Mimicry on the vaudeville stage tended to apply primarily to animal noises. Two prominent Australian mimics of the 1910s and 1920s were Bellora (birds and animals), and Budgerie Bill (bush animals).

MINSTREL FARCE: An afterpiece is a short, usually humorous one-act playlet or musical work which follows the main attraction (e.g. a full-length play) and hence concludes the theatrical programme. As part of the minstrel show, the afterpiece (usually referred to as a farce) was the third and final part of the evening's entertainment – the first two parts comprising the minstrel semi-circle and the olio (specialty acts). It could include all or just some members of the troupe, and typically involved lots of slapstick comedy played out by stereotypical characters. In some respects the minstrel afterpiece was styled after the harlequinade which concluded a pantomime.

The Australian minstrel farce continued to be part of the vaudeville tradition right through until the mid-1910s, by which time it gave way to the revusical, a one act musical comedy which combined elements of the minstrel farce, burlesque, musical comedy and revue. Arguably the greatest writer and star of Australian minstrel farces during the late 19th century was [W. Horace Bent](#). Other key figures to play a role in its development and popularity were the [Cogill Brothers](#), [F. M. Clark](#), [Charlie Fanning](#), [Kohlman and Gardner](#), [Johnny Gilmore](#) and [Will Whitburn](#).

MINSTRELSY: The term minstrelsy refers to the entertainment practices (notably songs, dances, skits, and stagecraft) of the 19th-century American blackface minstrel shows. Minstrelsy has been identified with Australia as early as 1838, when a Mr. Ferguson sang "the celebrated popular comic song 'Jim Crow'" at Sydney's [Royal Victoria Theatre](#). This was some two years after T. D. Rice's (Daddy Rice) hugely successful tour of England. There were numerous public performances of minstrel songs prior to the arrival of the first blackface troupes. Among the recorded performances was one by actor/manager Joseph Simmons, who sang "Jump Jim Crow" at the Royal Victoria on 17 August 1838.

Coloured Minstrel Troupe (USA)
Source: galleryhip.com



While minstrelsy, and the minstrel show in particular, began to lose its appeal in the USA by 1900, its popularity as a variety theatre entertainment continued in Australia and Britain up until the late 1910s. Its influence endured beyond that time, however, notably impacting on the development of vaudeville and in variety entertainment on radio and television as well as in the motion-picture and world-music industries of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

- See also: **Blackface • Endmen • Ethiopian • Minstrels Shows**
- See also: [Genres](#) page

MINSTREL SHOWS: The **minstrel show** was an entertainment phenomenon that originated in the USA during the 1830s and went on to become the most popular form of nineteenth century theatre throughout much of the western world. While minstrelsy was initially performed in blackface by all the artists in a troupe (and especially the comic endmen), over the years various changes were made, with some artists not using the make-up (including the interlocutor). The format became entrenched by the late 1840s, and was rarely changed until its demise around the turn of the century.

The typical minstrel performance followed a three-act structure, with the troupe dancing on to the stage where they were seated in a semi-circle – the two, or sometimes four, endmen (Mr Bones and Mr Tambo) situated at either side of the line-up and the central position taken up by the compere (known as Mr Interlocutor). In this section the performers were introduced prior to performing a solo act, with much of the humour coming from the verbal exchanges between the endmen and Mr Interlocutor. Following an interval the second part, known as the olio, saw the company return (without) introduction to individually or in partnership perform their specialty acts. This part more closely resembled the later vaudeville format. One of the highlights of this section would be the "stump speech" or as it was known in Australia the "comic lecture." The final part, often referred to in Australia as the "afterpiece," typically comprised a farce or a burlesque of a popular play.

MUSICAL ACTS: The term musical act was used to refer to any performance in which the artist displayed his or her ability to master a numerous array of traditional instruments; to perform one or a few instruments under unusual conditions (e.g. upside down or while casually performing a patter act); or by performing musical renditions using non-traditional instruments (e.g. wine glasses, blocks of wood, or hand-made multifarious musical contraptions).



Among the best known Australian-based performers to present a musical act during the 1910s and 1920s were multi-instrumentalist [Hats McKay](#) and pianist/whistler [Nat Hanley](#) (who is known to have performed at the piano while doing ape impersonations, whistling while smoking up to eight cigarettes). [Nellie Kelle](#)'s male impersonation act could also be regarded as a musical act in that she often played the piano while presenting a patter monologue.

The [Fredo Brothers](#) (left), a musical/acrobatic act from New Zealand were very popular in Australia during the 1910s. Other popular acts included father and son act Fredo and Con (unrelated to the Fredo Boys) and Kaimo (a magician and musician).

Theatre June (1916), 39.

MUSICAL COMEDY: The term musical comedy as it applies to pre-1930s Australia should not be assigned too much association with the type of entertainment that emerged on the Broadway stage during the 1920s and which has since come to be known as the "musical." Australian-written (or adapted) musical comedies of the 1890s and early 1900s appear to have combined influences from the minstrel farce, American burlesque and George Edwardes' Gaiety Theatre productions (which were themselves modernised versions of British burlesque and less intellectual and satirical than the Savoy operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan). It was the West End style of musical comedy which was predominantly brought to Australia by the bigger variety organisations established by [J. C. Williamson](#) and [Harry Rickards](#). By the mid-1910, however, the Australian versions were resembling something between a play with music and an expanded revusical (one act musical comedy).

The producer who perhaps most influenced the development of an Australian type of musical comedy around the turn of the century was American [John F. Sheridan](#). During several extended tours of the Australasian region he presented a number of very popular pieces that were either copied or adapted by local writers and producers. Some examples of early Australian musical comedy include: *Squattocracy* (1897), *The American Girl* (1898), *King Dodo* (1905), *Stop Your Nonsense* and *Mum's the Word* (both 1915), *Joyous Jones* (1917), *Mademoiselle Mimi* (1920) and two [George Edwards](#)³ shows from 1920 – *The Gumleaf Girls* and *The Wattle Bird*.

- See also: [Genres](#) page.

MUSICAL SCENA: The musical scena, which [Valantyne Napier](#) indicates should be pronounced "shay-nah" (45), was a popular part of the more up-market variety programmes in Australia between the mid-1910s and early 1920s. Often referred to as "Oriental scenas" due to the preponderance of shows built around the East and Far East cultures, they were associated with such companies as [Edward Branscombe's Dandies](#), the [Smart Set Entertainers](#) and [Huxhams Serenaders](#). Presented within a quite lavish and exotic setting and with equally extravagant costumes, the typical scena is believed to have been out over 20 or 30 minutes. The songs and dances were interspersed with dialogue that if not dramatically organised at least provided some sort of context for the setting and actions.

Among the more popular scenas staged in Australia were *In Sunny Japan* (1914), *In Tokyo* (1916), *In China Town* (1917), *In Yokohama* (1917), *In Fair Japan* (1918), *Asia Minor* (1918), *A Dream of the East* (1919) and *The Fan Tan Man* (1919).

MUSIC HALL: The term music hall applies to a type of British theatrical entertainment which was popular for around a hundred years (ca. 1850 to 1960). The term was seldom used in Australia, however, with "vaudeville" being preferred by audiences and the industry alike. Interestingly "vaudeville" was used in Britain, but generally referred to a more working-class type of entertainment (thus being aligned more with the "low" American burlesque genre). Music hall on the other hand was elevated to a more middle-class respectability. As with Australian vaudeville (or "variety" entertainment in general) music hall comprised a mix of popular song, comedy and specialty acts. The music hall references in Australian were mostly used in advertising, to announce or promote an artist who had previously appeared at a (usually well-known) music hall establishment.

Music hall can also refer to either the theatre or venue in which such entertainment takes place; or a type of music (of the type generally associated with such performances).

City Varieties Music Hall, Leeds
One of the longest-running and best preserved music halls in the UK
Courtesy of the *Daily Star*, Leeds



"ON TIME": As in "on [Clay](#) time" or "on [Fuller](#) time." This term was often used within the industry and media to refer to a performer's current or recent engagement with a particular organisation.

PANTOMIME: Attempts to provide a clear and distinct definition of pantomime, even Australian pantomime produced during the period covered by this archive, are impossible because its basic form and elements within that formed changed dramatically over time and within the different countries in which it was popularised. Essentially, though pantomime was a form of popular theatre associated with spectacle, music, comedy, dancing, fairy tales and (for some characters) cross-dressing. And like the modern day animated movie (or *The Simpsons*) pantomimes were often designed to appeal to adults and children alike.

Generally speaking, pantomimes staged in Australia were invariably based upon a popular fairytale or traditional story. While often being produced to coincide with Christmas (at least for the premiere) they rarely focused on Christmas or religious themes. A popular method, however, was to introduce the pantomime within a Christmas setting (Santa's home at the North Pole etc) and often with the tension introduced by the presence of the evil

³ The Australian George Edwards, not the British producer (whose surname is spelled Edwardes)

villain. From there the storyline tended to follow the action as prescribed in the title, leading evidently towards its happy conclusion, the spectacular "transformation scene" and the harlequinade (a scene of slapstick comedy played out by the characters associated with Commedia dell'arte - namely Harlequin, Columbine, Pantaloon and Clown). The main character roles also tended to be the principal boy, the principal girl, the dame, a villain (or villains), fairies (both good and bad) and an animal of sorts (played by one or two acrobatic actors). It must be remembered, however, that any one of these elements could be removed, expanded or adapted. Some of the most popular stories adapted for Australian pantomimes included: *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, *Dick Whittington*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Puss in Boots*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Babes in the Wood*. Arguably the most significant Australian-written pantomime was *The Bunyip* (1916). Comprising all Australian characters within a largely bush setting, it was written by [Ella Airlie](#), produced by [Nat Phillips](#) for Fullers' Theatres and featured [Stiffy and Mo](#) in comic roles

- See also: **Dame • Principal Boy • Principal Girl**

PANTOSCOPE: A pantoscope was a pre-cinema entertainment device enabling a theatre audience to watch a continuous panoramic painting scroll by on tremendous rollers. A moveable version of the cosmorama/cyclorama, audiences were able to watch scenes unfolding before their eyes. Bachelder's American Combination Pantoscope Australia tour (1877-78), for example, featured "great realistic paintings of views of America, New Zealand and Australia [covering] 15,000 feet of canvas" (*Argus* 6 July 1878, 12). The *Sydney Morning Herald* more specifically records the previous year that these scenes comprised: "The New South Wales Postal Route, from New York to San Francisco to Honolulu to Auckland and Sydney, terminating with a magnificent view of Cape Town, South Africa" along with "the new American diorama 'The Great Naval Engagement'... between the great ironclads Merrimac and Monitor which took place in Hampton Roads and caused such a sensation in naval warfare" (7 Apr. 1877, 2). Advertising for Bachelder's 1873 pantoscope tour featured an accompanying lecture by "the inimitable polygraphist" [W. Horace Bent](#) (*Sydney Morning Herald* 27 Sept. 1873, 4).

NB: 1. Pantoscope can refer to a lens first made about 1865 by Emil Busch, of Rathenow. Consisting of two symmetrical achromatic combinations of deep curves, works at a fizzle, and gives the very wide angle. It is extremely useful for work in confined situations, architectural subjects, panoramic views, etc.

2. The term is also given to a viewing apparatus for photographs, much resembling the alethoscope, lanternoscope, and neomonoscope.

PATTEROLOGY (PATTER ACT / PATER SONG): A comedy talk act between two people, patterology was usually performed by either two men or a male and a woman, and involved a prepared and rehearsed rapid manner of talking. The humour was very often set up by the straight person (or feeder) which allowed the principal comedian to provide laughs through various types of comic delivery. A single comedian could also "patter" (which is different to telling gags) using techniques such as a "pretend" phone call.



Patterologists would typically base the content of their act on topical, up-to-date issues, although favourite subjects like wives, mother-in-laws and authority figures were not uncommon. Patter acts also typically comprised or included the performance of a patter song - in which a very large number of words would be sung (sometimes usually at speed) to fit them to the music. Arguably the most popular Australia patterology act of the 1910s and 1920s was [Vaude and Verne](#) (left).

[National Library of Australia.](#)

POSING: (aka **Living Models / Living Statues / Tableau Vivant / Artistic Posing**) "Tableaux vivant," the French term for "living picture," is one of the descriptives used for carefully posed and often theatrically lit actors or artist's models. Throughout the duration of the display, the people shown do not speak or move, thus marrying stage performance with painting and photography. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries living models were able to appear on the variety stage either wholly or partly nude as long as they did not move during

the lit moments, as movement was deemed to be erotic. The performers would change position between changes of light. Artistic posing was performed by both men and women either as a solo act or in groups.

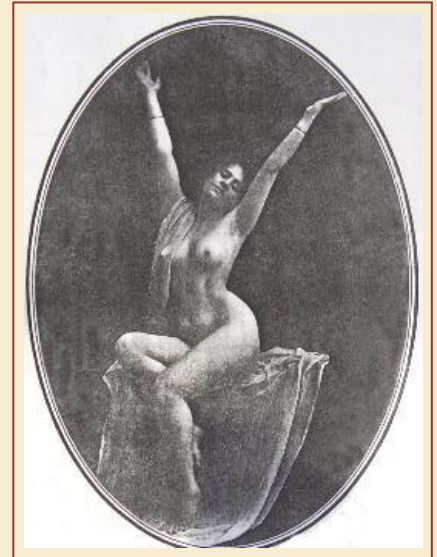
Artistic posing differs from athletic posing in that the latter act allows the performer to move, while the former is often accompanied lighting changes and music. The first established "living statues" performance in Australia is believed to have been staged in 1836 by a male performer (clothed in material to resemble marble) at Sydney's Theatre Royal. There are no reports of women performing this act until the late 1850s. Artistic posing is known to have still been performed on the stage as late as 1926, with Attila "the white statue" touring his act around the country.

Ellera Neri

"A fine art study."

Theatre Magazine Nov. (1916), 53.

- See also: **Equilibrists**



PRINCIPAL BOY: One of the lead roles in a pantomime, the part of the principal boy (aka the hero) was almost always played by a female actor. Some leading Australian or Australian-based principal boys of the 1910s and 1920s included [Amy Rochelle](#), [Nellie Kolle](#), [Queenie Paul](#), [Lola Hunt](#) and Dorothy Leigh.

PRINCIPAL GIRL: Another of the lead roles in a pantomime, the part of the principal girl (aka the heroine) was also always played by a female actor.



Will R. Barne's costume design for Princess Iris in *Djin Djin* (1895)



Amy Rochelle as Prince Charming in *Cinderella* (1920-1921)

Source: Viola Tait, Dames, *Principal Boys... And All That* (2000).

PRODUCER: As noted earlier in this glossary, the terms director and producer in Australia during the period covered by the AVTA were the inverse of the roles we understand them to be today. Hence a "producer" prior to the mid-1930s effectively looked after the staging – ensuring the quality and completeness of the production and leading the members of the creative team into realising an artistic vision. The phrase "under the direction of" referred to the role we typically associate today with that of the producer (a person involved with financing and originating the production and who oversees such things as promotion, hiring key personnel and negotiating with legal and other associated people and organisations).

One of the best-known vaudeville and pantomime producers of the 1910s and 1920s was [Nat Phillips](#), who worked almost exclusively under the direction of Fullers Theatres between 1914 and late 1928.

The AVTA uses the terms director and producer as they are understand today (except whenever part of a direct quotation)

PROGRAM / PROGRAMME: Program and programme have long been used inter-changeably to refer to the same concepts. The AVTA accepts a convention in Australian theatre to use the spelling "program" to refer to the actual printed publication or in the case of a radio show – a particular program (e.g. "Community Singing from Chatswood Town Hall"). "Programme" on the other hand is used to refer to the series of acts, items or events that make up an entertainment production and which may be listed in the printed program (as in "She will be the feature act on the Tivoli programme next week").

George Sorlie
1938 Souvenir Program



PROPS: A standard theatre industry abbreviation for "properties" – the equipment utilised by an act, troupe or production company. These might anything from clubs, swords, glasses and chairs to larger props such as trees, cases, boxes and tables. [Valantyne Napier](#) notes that within the variety community it was an un-written law that no-one ever touched or interfered with another act's props. "Most acts preferred to set and strike their own props," she writes. "If they used a stagehand to help or to do the job for them that stagehand would expect and receive a gratuity." If the stagehand was required to appear on the stage during the performance then he or she could expect to receive a payment that came under an award rate called "Appearance Money" (40).

PROS: A standard theatre industry abbreviation for "professionals." Vaudeville performers tended to refer to themselves and other performers as "pros." Within the industry, too, there was a fairly clear distinction (and a certain amount of disdain) between professionals and those they considered to be semi-pro and amateur performers.

PROTEAN ARTISTE: See DRAMATIC ACT

REVUE: A theatrical entertainment combining separate music, dance and sketches (often satirical and/or comedic), which are not necessarily linked to each other but may fall within or be linked to an umbrella theme. The revue differs from the revusical in that while both featured the same key elements of song, dance and sketch, the revusical comprises a dramatically-organised storyline. Both genres, however, are closely linked to vaudeville and musical comedy.

The first revue to be staged in Australia was *Come Over Here*, produced in 1913 by [J. C. Williamson's Ltd.](#) That production starred two performers who went on to have a significant presence in the country – [Daisy Jerome](#) and [Jack Cannot](#).

- See also: **Follies**

REVUSICAL: [from revue + musical comedy] The revusical, a one act musical comedy, is very possibly the only Theatrical genre ever to originate out of Australia. The term has been applied to Australian-produced works as early as 1915, almost a decade and a half before a production of this type has been identified anywhere else in the work. The Australian revusical owes it generic precedents to not just revue and musical comedy, however. American burlesque and the minstrel farce also played significant roles in its development. The earliest known productions which appear to have been a prototype revusical were staged in Brisbane in 1914 under [Ted Holland's](#) management, and not long after the [American Burlesque Company](#) played a season in the Queensland capital. By 1915 two members of that company, [Bert Le Blanc](#) and [Paul Stanhope](#), were touring separate troupes with stripped down versions of the type of burlesque work they had come to Australia with.

The standard format of an Australian revusical was a troupe of around six to eight actors (led by two comedians) and a female chorus of six. The productions were generally staged as the second half entertainment of a vaudeville bill (with the troupe not involved in the first half), and lasted somewhere between 40 to 60 minutes. Although the stories were dramatically organised, they were nevertheless quite simple and unsophisticated in relation to plays or the more extended musical comedy genre. These productions were also heavily reliant on improvised scenes – usually played out between the two lead comedians.

Some of the best known troupes to specialise in the revusical (despite being billed as "revue companies") were: Nat Phillips Stiffy and Mo Revue Company, Bert Le Blanc's Travesty Stars, George Wallace Revue Company, Jim Gerald Revue Company, Paul Stanhope Revue Company, Fullers American Revue Company (aka Ward and Sherman Revue Company)

NB: The issue of terminology (i.e. revue eventually becoming the dominant genre term) is perhaps one reason why historians have misunderstood the nature of the productions that were staged by companies led by Stiffy and Mo, Jim Gerald and George Wallace.

PROGRAMME - NO. 7		
Week Commencing Friday 26th September 1919		
1	Overture "The Very Best" (F. White)	The Orchestra
2	Opening chorus by the Town Topics	
3	Song "The Last Rose of Summer" Miss Gladys MacDowell	
4	"Dance with me" Miss Dorothy Leigh and Girls	
5	Comedy skit "The Village Blacksmith" Miss Alice Bennetto and Mr. Black	
6	Duet "Down the Vale" Misses Jessie and Irene Barlee	
7	Comedy Sketch "The Nannies" Miss Louie Salter, Messrs. Johnson, Black	
	Vernon, Jephcott, Gray and Hewitt	
8	Song "The Valley of the Nile" Miss Alice Bennetto and company	
9	Dance a la Maxime (music specially composed by Mr. Fred White)	
	Miss Nellie Asher and Mr. Lou Vernon	
10	Song "Songs of Araby" Mr. Leslie Jephcott	
11	Comedy concerted "I'll follow you" Mr. Yorks Gray and Miss Rita Nelson	
	Misses Milette, Salter, Barlee, Leigh, Messrs. Black,	
	Vernon, Johnson, Jephcott and Hewitt	
12	Comedy skit "Discipline on a Battleship" Messrs. Black, Johnson and	
	Vernon	
13	Finale "Ladder of Roses" Miss Alice Bennetto and Company	
Interval		
14	Entr'act "The Misery Bag"	
15	Duet "Rose of my Heart" Misses Gladys MacDowell and Mr. L. Jephcott	
16	Comedy sketch "Crazy Inventors" Messrs. Black, Vernon, Gray, Johnson	
	Jephcott and Hewitt	
17	Songs at the Piano Miss Dorothy Leigh	
18	The latest American Dancing craze	
THE JAZZ BAND AND DANCERS		
1	Missouri Blues	The Jazz Band, conductor Mr. Fred White
2	Society Jazz	Miss Nellie Asher and Mr. Yorks Gray
3	New York Jazz	Miss Dorothy Leigh and Mr. Walter Johnson
4	Charlie Chaplin Jazz	Miss Alice Bennetto and Mr. Elton Black
5	Everybody's Jazz	The Whole Company
GOD SAVE THE KING		

RUNNING ORDER: The list put up by the resident stage manager, or for larger organisations like the Fullers or the Tivoli by that organisations head office, indicating the order in which acts were to appear in a vaudeville programme. As [Valantyne Napier](#) notes, the running order sheet didn't always match the printed program (45).

SCENA: See MUSICAL SCENA

Town Topics Programme
Cremorne Theatre, Brisbane (1919)
Courtesy of the Fryer Library, The University of Queensland
Nat Phillips Collection UQFL9)

SERIO: A female singer of both serious (i.e. sentimental) and comic songs in vaudeville or music hall. Most serios, especially Australian performer) also danced. A serio who worked in revue, revusicals, opera or musical theatre was referred to as a soubrette.

SERPENTINE ACT: Although often referred to as the Serpentine Dance, this act was not so much a dance as a movement piece built around costumes, lighting and sheets of fabric which were whirled and waved around on batons to create swirling changes in colour. The act, invented in the mid-1890s by American dancer Lois Fuller in collaboration with Rudolph Aronson (manager of the Casino Theatre, New York) was blatantly copied, but also developed further, by vaudeville artists around the world, including Australia's Stella Gonzales (ca. 1905/06).



► **YouTube videos:** [Ameta \(1903\)](#) • [The Serpentine Dance](#)

Serpentine Dance
Source: YouTube

SHADOWGRAPHISTS: Shadowgraphy or ombromanie (sometimes referred to as "cinema in silhouette") is the art of performing a story or show using images made by hand shadows. French entertainer Félicien Trewéy is believed to have been the first Westerner to popularise the art of Chinese shadow puppetry called Ombres Chinoises (meaning "Chinese shadows" by developing shadows of famous people silhouettes. It subsequently became a popular act on the vaudeville stage throughout the latter half of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century. Two of the more popular shadowgraphists to work the Australian variety stage were Kavello (aka [Frank Cane](#)) and Ubex.

SHARP SHOOTERS: Sharp shooters and knife throwers were another popular vaudeville entertainment. They usually performed as part of a "Western" act that also involved skills such as lariat spinning and whip cracking. Among the more popular acts to present this type of entertainment in Australia were The Cracknells (who also included their greyhounds in the act), Rosie Rifle and Jack Martin. Russian juggler Zakaree Ermakov also performed a bow and arrow sharp-shooting in his act – splitting straws and shooting through flying objects.

SKETCH ACTS: Sketch acts in variety date back to the days of minstrelsy. Typically performed by either two males or a male and a female (although a two woman turn was not unheard of) these performances ranged from straight comedy or society-style dramatic acts. The onstage partnerships were often presented by performers who were married (or at least in a de facto relationship).

Some popular sketch artists over the 80 or more years that variety dominated the Australian stage include: [Charlie Fanning](#) and [Georgie Devoe](#), Will Stevens and Maud Lewis, [Martyn Hagan](#) and [Lucy Fraser](#), Lily Octavia and [Dave Warne](#) (all from the 1890s); and [Nat Phillips](#) and [Daisy Merritt](#), [Tom Armstrong](#) and [Priscilla Verne](#) (also Tom Armstrong and [Mabs Howarth](#)), the [Gilberts](#) (Will and Dora), and [Ern Delavale](#) and [Lily Vockler](#) (all ca. 1900 onwards).

SOUBRETTE: A solo singer and dancer in revue, musical comedy and opera. The soubrette was rarely a member of the chorus, although it was not uncommon for them to appear together. In these instances the soubrette was invariably the feature performer.

[Nat Phillips](#) and [Daisy Merritt](#)
Courtesy of Charles Norman. *When Vaudeville Was King* (1983),



STRENGTH ACTS: Feats of strength were often accompanied by acrobatic displays either by the strongman or woman, or if a troupe act, by other members. Acts included Roman rings, and the pulling, pushing or lifting of heavy objects etc. The Charlbert Brothers and Essie (originally from the South Australian town of Port Augusta) were a popular act during the 1910s, with Essie (aged 14 in 1916) being later replaced by her younger brother Harry ca. 1919.

Some strength acts also saw the performers demonstrate their strength of mind by performing feats that were seemingly horrendous – as with [Stampini](#) (below) who would step on nails so that they came through his foot or walk up a ladder of razor sharp swords.

R. STAMPINI. Showing nails coming through his foot.

STAMPINI, the Steel-Skinned Marvel, who opens at Clay's Bridge Theatre, Newtown, next Saturday.

This remarkable Act may be secured through the Australian Variety Booking Agency

Australian Variety 10 Mar. (1915), n. pag.

STUMP SPEECH: See COMIC LECTURE

TABLEAUX VIVANT: See POSING

T.A.E.A.: Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association. Established in 1914 following the amalgamation of several similarly named state branches, the union continued to represent its members as the T.A.E.A. until 1992, at which time it merged with the Australian Journalists' Association and the Actors' and Announcers' Equity Association in 1992 to form the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

TAMBO: See ENDMEN

TENT SHOWS: The concept of presenting non-circus "entertainment" under canvas dates back to at least the 1840s when religious groups such as the Millerites toured parts of America spreading their message. The emergence of the Chautauqua Movement in the 1870s saw a mix of vaudeville turns and didactic plays presented along with the group's lectures and sermons. While tent shows (both secular and non-secular) were touring the US during the latter decades of the nineteenth century – offering minstrel shows, vaudeville, drama, comedy, and musicals, arguably the highest profile thespian to work under canvas at some stage was Sarah Bernhardt, who in 1905 chose this theatrical medium in defiance of the Syndicate, which controlled more than three quarters of the major theatres in the US. With a seating capacity of 4,500, more than any of the theatres she would have played in, she reportedly made a fortune from the tour.

Possibly the first Australian-based entrepreneur to produce theatre under canvas was E. I. Cole, whose Bohemian Dramatic Company performed in tents in Sydney and Melbourne in 1903 and 1907. Inspired by both Bernhardt and Cole, [Philip Lytton](#) decided in 1907 to work Australia's agricultural show circuit with his own dramatic company. Three years later [Stanley McKay](#) began his seven decades career as a touring showman, putting together a pantomime company that played in 1500 seat capacity mining tent. For the next six years he mostly operated two companies around Australia and New Zealand, one presenting pantomime and the other Shakespeare. From the 1920s up until the mid-1960s, however, he concentrated on one company at a time presenting an array of entertainment forms, from drama and musical comedy to big splashy revues. The most celebrated Australian tent showman was [George Sorlie](#), who began staging his shows under canvas in 1920 with the help of Philip Lytton. Over the next two decades he crisscrossed the Australian continent, largely following the Agricultural shows, presenting a similar range of entertainment as McKay.



"Setting up the Tent": George Sorlie's Travelling Vaudeville Show

National Library of Australia
Photographer Jeff Carter

As with Lytton and McKay, Sorlie did not work only under canvas. The logistics and time involved in dismantling and re-erecting these massive tents invariably saw the labourers leapfrog towns along the tour itinerary in order to have time to set up their moving theatre. The company in the meantime would present a short season (under a permanent roof) somewhere else.

Some of the other companies who worked under canvas at some stage were: [Kate Howarde's](#) Dramatic Players, Barton's Follies, Mack's Players, [Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers](#), the [Humphrey Bishop](#) Company, Maurice Diamond's Marquee Theatre, Coleman's Pantomime Company, Lionel Walsh's Musical Comedy Company, and the Lynch Family Bellringers.

TRIAL NIGHTS: Also known as amateur nights, these were often held by the lower level vaudeville entrepreneurs as a means of providing emerging performers or acts with a chance to show their talent (and possibly lead to a paid engagement or a contract). It was also an additional entertainment for audiences, who were given the opportunity to give "the bird" to any act that didn't measure up. Interestingly, a typical trial night was usually held on Fridays (as with [Harry Clay's](#) Sydney operations) as opposed to the perhaps quieter weekday nights. Many performers who went on to carve out successful careers initially endured a trial night. [George Wallace](#), for example, reportedly got his start with Harry Clay by presenting a well-received trial at the [Bridge Theatre](#) in late 1918 or early 1919.

TUMBLING ACTS: A gymnastics-orientated performance, tumbling acts generally involved a troupe of acrobats performing various forms of flip flaps, backwards and forward somersaults, handsprings and tinsikas etc. The more people involved and the greater the speed at which the performers did their act the more popular it tended to be.

TURN: See ACT

VARIETY: The term "variety" is more of an over-arching descriptive than a specific category of popular culture production. Variety entertainment therefore tends to specifically comprise such genres as revue, revusical, revuomime, follies, burlesque, cabaret, and pantomime – all of which depend on a variety of individual performance forms (namely song, dance, topical sketches, comedy etc) to create a whole entertainment package. Musical comedy can also be included under the umbrella term variety.

VAUDEVILLE: Vaudeville is a theatrical genre which comes under the umbrella term variety entertainment and which had its greatest period of success in Australia between the mid-1890s and the mid-1920s. Although vaudeville (also known as music hall in Great Britain) emerged out of the USA and England in the 1880s, it was not until [Harry Rickards](#) began removing minstrelsy from his programmes around 1895 that the genre began to gain a footing. While it shares many performance similarities with minstrelsy, vaudeville differs mainly in that a programme comprises a series of separate, unrelated acts that are presented without introduction (as with the second part "olio" of a minstrel show). Each act could last anything from 5 to 30 minutes.

The types of acts that can be presented as part of a vaudeville show are limited only by the imagination. Pre-1930s turns in Australia included, for example, comedians, singers, patterologists and sketch acts, popular and classical musicians, jazz and/or ragtime bands, dancers, animal acts, magicians and illusionists, female and male impersonators, acrobats, illustrated singers, jugglers, tumblers and wirewalkers, one-act plays or scenes from plays, athletes, lecturing celebrities and minstrels. Additional attractions included films, and displays and demonstrations of the latest technological inventions and new sports. Following on from minstrelsy, vaudeville became the dominant entertainment medium of the early twentieth century, and while many have claimed that its demise was a direct consequence of the competition from film, a significant contribution to its downfall was the depression, which made it uneconomical to both stage and tour.

VENTRILLOQUISM: Ventriloquism, or ventriloquy involves the manipulation a performer's voice so that it appears that the voice is coming from elsewhere, usually a puppeteered "dummy". The art of "throwing one's voice" dates back at least to ancient Greece where it was part of religious practice (ventriloquism is itself a Latin word meaning "comes from the belly"). By the Middle Ages the practice was linked to witchcraft but by the 19th century had shed its mystical connotations and became a popular act on the variety stage.

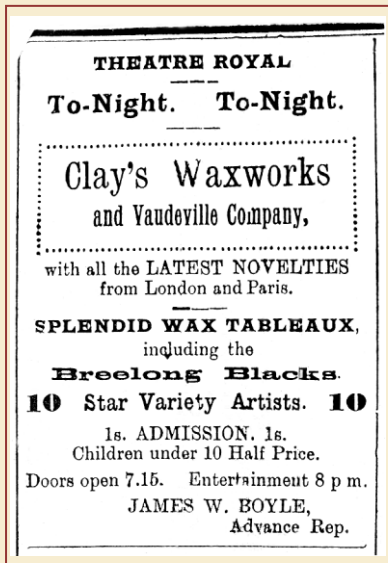
Numerous ventriloquists toured Australia during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, while quite a few also emerged from the local industry. Some of the more popular to be associated with the Australian stage were Arthur Baron, [Sydney James](#), [Frank Cane](#) (aka Kevello), Harry Harrison, Lawrence Johnston (American).



Sydney James and "Billy"
Theatre Magazine Mar 1915, 33.

WAXWORKS:

Waxworks figures were a popular part of a many vaudeville touring companies around the turn of the century. Much of their appeal lay in the mix of notable and infamous people of the times. Their popularity was such that some companies included the term waxworks in their name – for example: [Clay's Waxworks and Comedy Company](#) (1901-1911), [John] Rowley's Waxworks Museum and London Company (ca. 1897-1899), and Walter Bell's Waxworks, Boer War and London Vaudeville Company (ca. 1899-1900).



Most of the waxworks figures supplied to these companies were made by Max Krietmayer. Based in Melbourne, Krietmayer's company had been an anatomical museum in the early 1860s before he sold his figures and moved to Sydney. He returned to Melbourne in 1869, however, and established himself as the city's sole waxworks proprietor. The Victorian government subsequently commissioned him to make figures for international exhibitions. Notable among these were figures of Aborigines for the Paris (1878) and Indian and Colonial (1886) exhibitions.

Among the waxworks made by Krietmayer for both his own museum and touring vaudeville companies were historical (and infamous) figures such the royal family, Sir Henry Parkes, Madame Melba, cricketer Victor Trumper, the Breerlong Blacks, Bismark, Ned Kelly, murderer Frederick Deeming, boxers Bill Squires, Jack Johnson and Tommy Burns, cattle rustlers the Kenniffs, Cecil Rhodes and Pope Leo XIII.

Gympie Times (Qld) 26 Mar. (1901), 2

WHIP CRACKERS: The art of ship-cracking was usually performed as part of a "Western" act – which also typically involved sharp-shooting and/or lariat spinning etc. A single turn involving ship-cracking was difficult to sustain given the limited things that the performer could do. A common feature, however, was to whip an object off a stand or out of the mouth or hand of an assistant etc.

WIRE AND AERIAL ACTS: Wire acts tended to have a limited place in vaudeville due to the need for both height and distance, and hence were more commonly associated with the circus. Nevertheless some wire acts were presented on the vaudeville stage, albeit only in theatres with a large enough stage (i.e. the Tivoli).

The greatest Australian tight-rope walker, and arguably the greatest the world has ever seen, was [Con Colleano](#) (aka the "Wizard of the Wire"). The first person to perform a forward somersault on a wire (hugely difficult because the performer has to be able to place his or her feet on the wire before seeing it), Colleano was born in 1899. He began performing around 1910 and was still actively involved in performance through until the early 1950s.

Other Australian or Australian-based wire and aerial acts included The Aerial Dentines, the Three Kalmas, Daisy Harley, and the Hatton Boys.

YE OLDE ENGLYSHE FAYRE: As an object of historical research [Ye Olde Englyshe Fayres](#) (YOEF) are difficult to categorise or compartmentalise because the term can refer to several forms and modes of entertainment (and sometimes at the same time). These include, for example, a specific venue (usually open-air); a management company; a place or location (as in the name of a fairground or a block of land associated with YEOFs); and an entertainment concept (including festivals, charities festivals, charity benefits, community events and even minstrel shows). It was not uncommon, too, for producers to include moving pictures as part of the entertainment. Because of the inherent difficulties involved selecting the appropriate place for individual YOEF entries the AVTA provides a specific page within the Industry section.



Con Colleano
Courtesy of Mark St Leon, Circopedia

Although a particularly late nineteenth century phenomenon here in Australia, dating back to at least the early 1880s, Ye Olde Englyshe Fayres are known to have been presented on occasion in the 1920s and even the mid-1930s.